THOMAS GUTHRIE MARQUIS

MARGUERITE DE ROBERVAL

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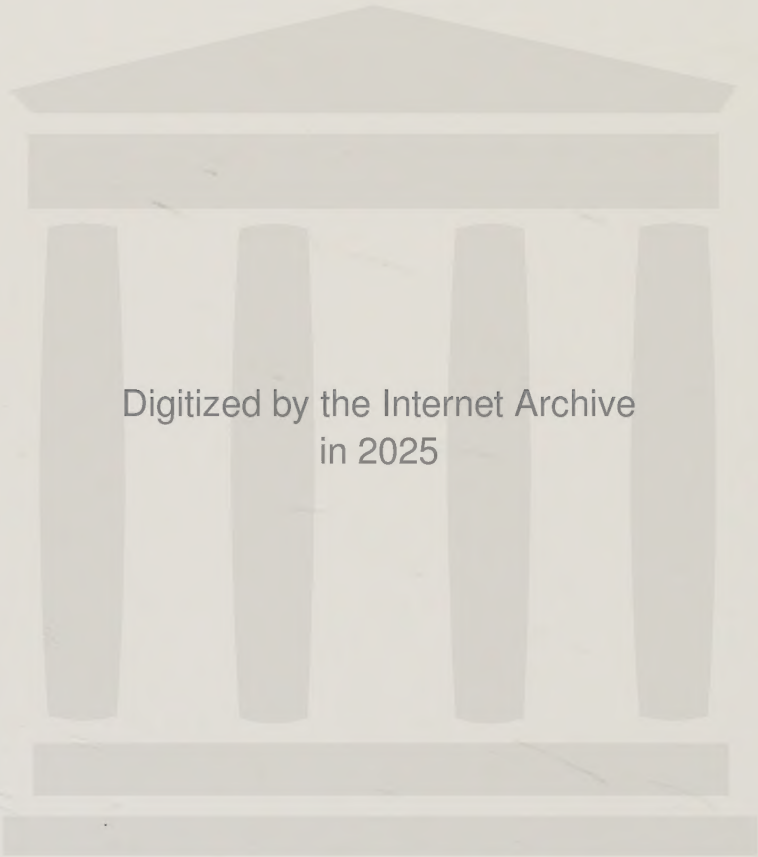
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Marguerite de Roberval: A Romance of the Days of Jacques Cartier

Thomas Guthrie Marquis

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MARGUERITE DE ROBERVAL

A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF JACQUES CARTIER

By

T. G. MARQUIS

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CHAPTER I

"These narrow, cramped streets torture me! I must get out of this place or I shall go mad. The country, with its rolling fields and great stretches of calm sky helps a little, but nothing except the ocean will satisfy my spirit. Five years have gone now, and I am still penned up in this miserable hole, with no power to go abroad, save for a cruise up the Channel, or a run south along the coast. If matters do not change, I think I shall quietly weigh anchor on La Hermine and slip across the Atlantic without leave of King or blessing of priest. I tell you, Claude, it would be rare sport to go that way, without a good-bye word to friend or lover. Gold is there in plenty, and diamonds are there, and a road to the Indies; and if we should bring back riches and new discoveries the King would forgive our boldness."

The speaker was a middle-aged man, with jet-black hair and beard, and piercing black eyes. He was as straight as a mid-forest pine, and tanned and wrinkled with years of exposure to sun and wind, but was a handsome, commanding fellow withal. His name was Jacques Cartier. He was the most famous seaman in France, and had already made two trips across the stormy Atlantic in boats in which nineteenth-century sailors would fear to cross the Channel.

His companion was Claude de Pontbriand, a young man of gentle birth, who had been with him on his second voyage. He was as dark as Cartier, with a lion-like neck and shoulders, a resolute mouth and chin, and a kindly eye, whose expression had a touch of melancholy. Among his companions he was known as their Bayard; and the purity of his life, the generosity of his disposition, and his dauntless courage made the title a fitting one.

The two men were walking along one of the winding thoroughfares of the French seaport of St Malo, on a glorious moonlight evening in the autumn of 1539. The hour, though still early, was an unusual one in those days for anybody to be abroad simply for pleasure; and the little town was quiet and deserted save for an occasional pedestrian whom business, of one kind or another, had compelled to leave his home.

There was a short silence after Cartier's remarks, before De Pontbriand replied:

"I thought you had had enough of the New World."

"Enough!" exclaimed Cartier. "That New World is mine. I first took possession of it. My cross still stands guarding my interests at Gaspé, and my memory is still dear to the red men from Stadacona to Hochelaga."

"I am not so certain of the friendship of the Indians," interrupted his companion. "If we had not carried off old Donnacona and his fellow-chiefs it might have been so, but now that they are dead you will have some difficulty in inventing a story that will regain you the confidence of their tribesmen. Ah! Cartier, I warned you then; and now I only regret that I did not oppose your action with my very sword. Poor devils! It was pitiful to see them droop and droop like caged birds, and finally die one by one. Poor old Donnacona! I expect we shall find his spirit back on the heights of Stadacona if we ever cross the ocean again."

"That was a mistake," replied Cartier, "but one never knows just what will be the results of an action. I did it for the best. I thought the Indians would enjoy a visit to Europe as much as did the two lads I brought over on my first voyage. They were too old, however, and seem to have been rooted to the soil. I am afraid we shall have to invent a way of explaining their absence should we return to Hochelaga. Would it not be well to marry them to noble ladies, and give them dukedoms in France to govern?"

"A good idea, with the one drawback that it is false; and there are enough false men already in France without an honest seaman swelling their numbers. But my impression of the savages is, that you will have a hard time to make them believe your story. They are a deep people, and, as we found them, a generous people; and once deceived, you will find that they will never again have perfect confidence in their betrayers."

"Perhaps so; I daresay you are right. But why borrow trouble that is years and leagues away from us? We are here in old France, and likely to stay here."

"I am not so sure of that."

"What!"

"I am not so sure of that. I had a long *tête-à-tête* with Jean François de la Roque to-day, and he is wavering. He has much influence in Picardy, and King Francis is greatly indebted to him. He declares that if he wants a ship, or indeed a fleet, he can have it. He professes to be anxious to win souls in the new land of darkness, as he calls it; but do not lay too much stress on the darkness when you meet him. The gold and the diamonds and the furs will touch his heart much quicker than anything else. He is a shrewd fellow, and if you can get him enthusiastic over your New World you will soon be at your beloved Stadacona, and have a chance to stay there too. His idea is to plant a colony there, develop the resources of the country, and, I have no doubt, save the souls of the inhabitants at his leisure. I wish we could get together some of our old friends. A few of the men who pulled safely through the scurvy would be a great help on another such expedition."

"Where is Charles de la Pommeraye?" interrupted Cartier.

"De la Pommeraye! Have you not heard the last news of him?"

"No; what fresh scrape has he been getting into? There is no braver fellow alive; and if he does get into a few more quarrels than the rest of us, it is merely because of his excessive gallantry. A petticoat will always bring him to his knees. Why man, at Hochelaga he doffed his plumed hat to every fair savage who attracted his eye. If I get a chance to go again I will find him, though I have to search every hole and corner in France."

"I am much afraid you will have some trouble in finding him. The last report I had of him was, that he was seen lying in the streets of Paris with several daggers gracing his breast. He was my friend, as you know, and, despite his foolhardiness and follies, the only man in whom I could ever have perfect confidence. I had always expected

he would meet just such an end; but I have shed more tears for him than I ever thought to shed for any man."

"Charles de la Pommeraye dead!" exclaimed Cartier. "I cannot believe it!"

"Neither can I!" interrupted a sturdy voice that made both men leap back and lay their hands on their weapons. "Neither can I! And if any one doubts my word, here's my sword to prove it!"

"La Pommeraye!" cried Claude. "Where in Heaven's name did you spring from?" and the two men seized the hands of the young giant who, in the attire of a fashionable gallant of the day, with gay-coloured doublet and hose, richly plumed hat, and surtout trimmed with gold lace, stood laughing before them.

"Paris, where I was seen lying dead in the streets. How long is it, Claude, since you have had such a poor opinion of me? I have been put to strange straits in my day, but I have never yet slept in the streets. Be thankful I did not leave the two of you to be carried out of this square in the morning. I came here spoiling for a fight, and had my sword all ready to begin carving you when Cartier's voice struck me like a whiff of bracing, salt-sea air. But what great enterprise have you on hand? Your serious looks bespeak some weighty scheme. Whatever it is, my sword is at your service."

"I doubt if it would be wise to take such a fire-eating duellist into our confidence," said Claude, regarding his friend with a smile.

"Now, Claude, that is hardly fair. You know I am no duellist. I merely fight when I am compelled to, and never without just provocation. For instance, I had a delightful passage-at-arms last night, but it was no fault of mine. I was coming across the Sillon when a pretty girl came towards me with a leisurely step that seemed to say: "I have just been watching for you." She had a face like a flower, in the moonlight, and I could not resist snatching a kiss. That was all: but it acted like a match in a powder magazine. She started back with a cry. Evidently she had not been waiting for me; and before I could apologise, or take back the kiss, her lover swooped down upon me with drawn sword."

"I trust," exclaimed Claude, "he let a little of the impudence out of your gallant hide."

"Not a drop. I know the danger of kissing pretty girls in the public thoroughfare, and never do it without having my hand on my sword-hilt. He sprang forward, and I sprang back. The girl was between us, and in his haste to spit me, he pushed her roughly aside. The slight pause gave me time to draw my sword. He came at me, blind with fury, but I was on my guard. A pass or two showed me that I could disarm the fellow in five minutes. The fair one stood by, mutely wringing her hands, and as I wished to stand well in her opinion, I resolved to show her what I could do. I have been learning some cuts and thrusts and guards in Paris, and now was my chance to put them in practice. I bewildered the fellow, and when I thought her highness must have seen that I was the better man, and the more worthy, I let out with a rapidity rarely seen in musty old St Malo, and my opponent's sword went clanging against the wall.

"The man was no coward. No sooner was his sword out of his hand than he tore open his shirt, crying: 'Stab, villain, insulter of women!' But if I had attempted to take him at his word, and punch a hole or two in him, I could not have done so, for even while he spoke his beloved sprang between us, and hissing the epithet 'Coward!' in my face, flashed a dagger towards my breast. So quick was the stroke that I am afraid only a miracle could have prevented a woman from at last making a permanent impression on the heart of Charles de la Pommeraye, but I was once more to be saved from the base designs of the sex. My antagonist seized her hand from behind with a vice-like grip; and there we all stood—a most interesting group of enemies. He was the first to speak.

"'Put up your toy,' he said sternly to the girl, who, except for that one word 'Coward!' had never uttered a sound since the beginning of the struggle. 'Put up your toy; my life is in his hand. He has won it with the sword.'

"'Charles de la Pommeraye,' I answered, 'never strikes a weaponless man. Take up your sword, my friend, and let us give this fair Amazon a little more worthy entertainment.'

"But he would not even look at the weapon that had failed him.

"'Here it is,' said I, lifting it from the ground. 'But I am very much afraid we shall both have to sheathe our swords for to-night. Yours has lost a good foot. That wall has excellent granite in it. But meet me here to-morrow with a fresh weapon, and we can finish our little difference by the light of yonder moon.'

"'I am no duellist,' he cried, 'but I accept your offer. Your name is known to me, Charles de la Pommeraye, and I know you as a man of honour, despite your unknightly conduct towards a defenceless woman. See, she has fainted! Help me with her to my house, and to-morrow at this same hour I will meet you at this spot without seconds or witnesses. Lift her gently,' he added, as he raised the girl's shoulders. 'Put your arm about her on the left, and we can carry her between us.'

"But she was perfectly limp. We were really dragging her through the street, when I said: 'This will never do. Lead the way. I will follow you.' As I spoke, I raised her from the ground, and although he resisted my action, he soon saw that there was no help for it, and strode before me in silence. The moon shone full in the girl's face as she lay in my arms, pale and lifeless, and I saw the error I had committed. She was unmistakably of high-born lineage, and I would have given worlds to undo my rash action; though what she was doing at that place and at that hour is beyond me to conjecture. But we were at the door of my antagonist's house in a few moments, and he bade me hand over my burden. As he took her in his arms he exclaimed: 'To-morrow night, remember. The Sillon: and come without witnesses.'"

"Quite a romance," said Cartier; "but you are never long in a place without picking up something of the sort. How long have you been in St Malo?"

"Since yesterday afternoon. I had gone out for a moonlight stroll, and was crossing the Sillon, dreaming of that glorious voyage we had together up the Hochelaga."

"Well, Charles," said Claude, "have a care! If you keep up this sort of thing you are never likely to have another such voyage. But, by the way, did not your adversary act in rather a strange way for a lover? He allowed you to carry the fair one, did you say?"

"Yes, and walked ahead, as if he had been her father."

"I am inclined to think you have been mistaken. No lover would have behaved in that manner. He is probably her father or elder brother."

"Neither, neither, Claude? He was too young to be her father, unless the moonlight greatly deceived me, and he resembled her as much as I do one of the gargoyles on Notre Dame de Paris. But I am glad you have thrown out the hint. I will diligently enquire of him if he is her lover, and if he is not, I will be satisfied with disarming and humiliating him a little for his boldness. If he is, however, I am much afraid I shall have to despatch him to Heaven, as an obstacle in the way of my winning the lady of the dagger. I have felt the charms of many a fair woman before, but none ever had power to move me as did that helpless girl last night as I carried her to her home. She is an angel, Claude, with the face of a Madonna!"

"Well done, Charles!" exclaimed Claude, laughing. "I am glad to hear that you are caught at last. Hear him, Jacques; how delightful it is to hear him confess that he has felt his heart burn before now. But this is the one, only, and lasting affection. Ah! Charles, you are still a sad dog! In this same town six years ago I heard you swear that you would live and die true to the beautiful daughter of the Sieur des Ormeaux; in just one week you were on your knees to Cosette, the daughter of the drunken captain of a fishing smack; and in two months after that I saw you myself, in the shadow of Mont Royal, wildly gesticulating your undying devotion to the daughter of old Adario, that greasy potentate whose warriors were filled with awe at the imposing way in which you bellowed a 'Te Deum.'"

"Silence, Claude, or, by Heaven, I shall forget that we are sworn friends in love, in war, and in peace, and challenge you to fight as soon as I have finished with the fool whom I must now hasten to meet. Do not follow me, I beg of you; I would not have him think I

had friends standing by to witness our struggle. Good-bye; and if I am not back in half an hour you will find an account of all my worldly possessions in an iron box, about six inches square, in my room at the old inn."

Without another word he strode away from them, and a few paces brought him to the end of the street, where the buildings ceased at the beginning of the neck of land known as "The Sillon," which connects St Malo with the mainland. At that time this strip of land was not nearly so wide as it has since become, and was merely a narrow causeway, protected from the encroachment of the tides by a stone wall on the side towards the sea. The two men followed him no further than the end of the street, and stood in the shadow of the last house, waiting to learn the result of the encounter.

"There goes the bravest fellow in France," said Claude, as they watched him disappear. "I only wish there were more like him. He was born to fight; and he has done so much of it that he has at last come to look upon a duel as a necessary part of his day's amusement. And the best thing about him is that he has killed fewer men than any other duellist in France. He has the heart of a child, and the arm of a giant. But hark! Stand close. His opponent comes this way. He is past. Listen! By Heaven, but they have lost no time. They are at it already. I only wish he had not insisted on our staying concealed. I would rather see him at sword play than watch an army in action. But what is that? A woman's scream, as I live!"

CHAPTER II

In order to explain the scream, it will be necessary to go back to the morning of the day on which this conversation took place. St Malo was looking its dingiest. A heavy rain had fallen during the night, and a mist clung to the muddy streets and grey walls till nearly noon. The little town, with its narrow thoroughfares and towering houses, was as gloomy as a city of the dead; foul odours rose on all sides, and would have been unbearable but for the cool breeze which swept in from the Channel, driving the mists and fog before it.

In one of the highest and most substantial houses two young women sat at the casement of an upper window. The house was a gloomy one, without adornment of any kind except an arched porch, over which was chiselled some motto, or emblem, that had become undecipherable from age. The room where the two girls sat was plain in its appointments, and badly lighted, though its sombreness was relieved by numerous feminine trifles scattered about, betraying the character and tastes of its occupants.

The elder of the two was Marguerite de Roberval, niece of the nobleman from Picardy to whom reference has already been made. She was about twenty-four, dark, and very beautiful, with masses of black hair crowning a well-set head, finely-cut features, and a figure which, even as she sat on the low window-seat, showed tall and willowy. Her beauty would have been flawless but for one defect—her chin was a shade too prominent, giving her face an expression of determination, which, while destroying its symmetry, told of a strong will, and a firmness amounting almost to obstinacy. She had the lithe grace of a panther, and though her repose was perfect, a close observer might have noticed a nervous tension in her attitude and bearing that told of a hidden force and energy resolutely controlled.

At her feet, on a wide-spreading rug, sat her friend and companion, Marie de Vignan—in many ways her exact opposite. Not so dark as Marguerite, nor quite so tall, with a face inclined to be more round than oval, bright, well-opened eyes, and a merry, laughing mouth, her plump figure and vivacious expression bespoke a happy,

contented nature, on whom the world and life sat lightly. She had come from Picardy with Marguerite, and was, indeed, the ward of De Roberval. Her father had been killed by a bursting petronel a few years before, and had left his only child to the charge of his friend and comrade-in-arms.

"Heigh-ho!" said Marie, with a half-suppressed yawn, "will this fog never lift? Who would have thought, after the glorious moon of last night that we should have such a day as this on the morrow?"

"Patience, *chérie*," replied her friend, looking up from the embroidery on which she was engaged. "We have had many such mornings since we came here, but they only make the day seem brighter when the sun does shine out. See, there is the blue sky beyond the housetops! The full sun will doubtless be out ere noon. I often think a wise Providence must send all this mist and rain. If some such means were not taken to cleanse these streets, we should soon not be able to breathe the air of St Malo. I cannot understand what has taken possession of my uncle to leave our broad acres in Picardy for these wretched streets and bare, gloomy walls."

"It is delightful, Marguerite, to hear you complaining. I have been wondering how much longer we were to be kept cooped up here like moulting falcons. I am not much given to grumbling, but I do long for a breath of fresh air, and room to stretch my limbs without falling into a mud-hole, or being nearly knocked over by a clumsy sailor or fisher-lad. When we left Picardy I thought we were going to Fontainebleau; I never dreamed we were about to exchange the sunny slopes of the Somme for this!"

"No doubt," said Marguerite, with a little sigh, "my uncle has good reasons for remaining here so long. You know his cherished schemes about the New World."

"Yes, and I shall never forgive M. de Pontbriand for suggesting to him that he should leave France. Now that we at last have peace, I was beginning to hope that my warrior guardian would find time to take us to Court, and let us see a little more of life and the gay world there. I was tired of staying at home, I must confess, but since my experience of these dreary stone walls I ask for nothing better than

our fine broad halls in Picardy. However, as you say, there is no use complaining. But have you forgotten—you promised to tell me the whole story of your last night's adventure. I have been patient, and asked no questions; but I am dying of curiosity to hear how it all happened."

"There is very little to tell," answered Marguerite, with some reluctance. "We were coming home in the moonlight, as you know, my uncle and I, and as we crossed the Sillon my uncle stopped to say a word to a sailor who gave him good-night as we passed. I did not notice that he was not at my side, and so was a few paces in front of him, and in full light of the moon, while he was in shadow. Suddenly a swaggering ruffian of a fellow came towards me with an insolent jest, and before I could realise what he was about to do, I felt his lips touch my cheek. I cried out, and my uncle instantly rushed upon him with drawn sword. That is the whole story."

"But what was the result? Your uncle did not kill the villain, did he? And what could have happened to cause you—you, whose courage has never been known to flinch at the sight of blood—to be borne home in a swoon? I assure you, Bastienne and I had trouble enough with you last night. You have not told me everything, Marguerite. I am sure of that."

Mdlle. de Roberval's dark cheek flushed a little.

"It is a painful story," she said, with some hesitation. "I never thought to stand by and see a De Roberval disarmed. Yet, such was this scoundrel's skill, that after a few passes he succeeded in wrenching my uncle's sword from his hand, and we were at his mercy."

"And what then?" cried the younger girl, breathlessly, as Marguerite came to a pause again. "I would I had been in your place to see such sword-play. I thought your uncle was invincible."

"So did I, until last night. I have often seen him in sword contests before, and none were ever able to withstand him; but he was as a child in the hands of this man."

"Why was I not there to behold this prodigy? But for your friend De Pontbriand and that eagle-eyed seaman who comes to visit your uncle, I have not seen a *man* since I left Picardy."

"I trust you may never chance to see this cowardly scoundrel. But if you compel me to finish my story—when my uncle's sword flew clanging against the parapet, I could stand by in silence no longer. I had looked to see the fellow punished as he deserved, and now a De Roberval stood unarmed before him. Everything swam before my eyes, I thought only of saving my uncle's life, and, drawing the little dagger I always carry, I would have plunged it into the villain's breast, had not my uncle caught my hand. I remember no more till I found myself at home here."

"Bravo, *m'amie*!" cried the enthusiastic Marie, clapping her hands. "I knew your courage would not fail you. But what a terrible experience for you to have to go through! Thank Heaven it ended no worse. But tell me, what did this gallant, who proved himself so mighty a swordsman, look like? Describe him for me."

"I cannot, you foolish child! Do you suppose I noticed his features? He was tall and powerful; but beyond that I saw nothing, except his laughing eyes as they met mine when my dagger touched his breast."

"It is not every day one meets a man who can laugh with a dagger at his breast," exclaimed Marie, half-jestingly, half-serious. "I must indeed see him. I shall know no peace until I do."

"Then your desire is granted," said Marguerite, "for, if I am not mistaken, there is the man himself across the street at this moment. Yes, I am sure it is he; see, he throws a kiss to that fisher-maiden opposite. That will show you the true character of your hero."

Despite Marguerite's sarcasm, the man whom the two girls now beheld was a noble specimen of humanity. Full six feet four in height, with broad, athletic shoulders, straight, clean limbs, and a face as bright as a schoolboy's, though his age could not have been under thirty, he was a man who could not fail to attract attention wherever he might be seen.

He was clad in the height of the fashion, and his gay apparel, with its lace trimmings and jewelled ornaments, bespoke him no commonplace adventurer. But the most striking feature in his appearance was his hair, which fell in sunny locks upon his shoulders from under his velvet hat with its spreading plume. In truth he looked more like a Norse Viking of old than a cavalier of the sixteenth century.

"What a noble fellow!" was Marie's involuntary exclamation, as she gazed upon him.

"Noble!" said Marguerite, scornfully. "You surely forget what you are saying. Would you call his conduct of last night noble?"

"Oh, as to his conduct and character that is another matter. But what a magnificent carriage he has; and what shoulders! I should like to meet such a man as that. See, he has turned his eyes this way. Whoever he is, I should certainly fall in love with him if I knew him. It seems to me he is like what Charlemagne must have been; or—yes—like Charles de la Pommeraye!"

Marguerite started at the name.

"What do you know of La Pommeraye?" she exclaimed.

"Have you forgotten, or were you not present the other day when M. de Pontbriand was lamenting the death of his friend in Paris? You have surely heard him speak of him. I wept when I heard of his untimely end, for I have ever had fond recollections of Charles de la Pommeraye."

"You, Marie? What can you mean? You never mentioned his name to me. Now that I hear it again, I remember that that was the name my assailant had the audacity to give my uncle last night. It had vanished from my memory when I swooned. But what do you know of De la Pommeraye? Where did you ever meet him?"

"That man's name La Pommeraye?" cried Marie, disregarding these enquiries, and gazing eagerly after the retreating figure of the fair-haired unknown. "Can there be two of the same name? Could it be possible that he was not dead, or that Claude's friend was another!

Yes, that is he; I am sure of it now! How was I so stupid as not to recognise him? I remember him," she explained, "some sixteen years ago, when I was a very little girl. He was a great lad, not more than fifteen, who took me in his arms, and tossed me high above his head. He had just come from Pavia, where, in the disastrous battle, he had twice saved my father's life. Since then I have never seen him; but I have heard of him occasionally as flitting about by sea and land, seeking adventure; a restless soul, who never seems happy unless he is in danger of being killed."

"I am sorry to hear that you know him," said Marguerite, a little coldly, "for I fear he is in danger of being killed in earnest this time. As I came to myself in my uncle's arms at the door last night, I heard him say, 'To-morrow night, remember! The Sillon: and come without witnesses.' The words can have only one meaning. They must be about to meet again to-night; and in a calmer mood, and with a better weapon, my uncle cannot fail to administer to him the chastisement his insolence deserves."

"Pray Heaven the Sieur de Roberval may not meet his death instead," exclaimed Marie fervently. "If this man and Claude de Pontbriand's friend be one and the same, there is no more famous duellist in France. He has never been defeated; and he has the advantage of youth and strength on his side. Your uncle will require the aid of an angel from Heaven if he is to avenge himself on La Pommeraye."

Marguerite had risen, and was pacing the room with an agitated air.

"I have been greatly troubled about it," she said. "I did not know what you tell me now, of course; and I hope and pray that you may be wrong. But my uncle is not so young as he once was, and he will be quite alone, and at the mercy of this villain. I have been trying to think out some plan by which it might be prevented, but I do not know what we can do."

"There would be no use speaking to your uncle, of course; anything we could say would only make him the more determined. But I will tell you what we can do; we can go ourselves, and see fair play."

"Go ourselves, you crazy girl! What are you thinking of?"

"I mean that if we were present, in hiding of course, and unknown to any one, we could intervene in time to prevent bloodshed, and if your uncle should chance to be getting the worst of it, we should certainly be able to save his life. La Pommeraye could hardly kill him in our presence. We should, besides, have the rare opportunity of seeing a contest between the two best swordsmen in France," and the impetuous girl's eyes sparkled with some of the warlike fire of her warrior ancestors. "Would it not be a glorious chance, Marguerite? But how we should manage to conceal ourselves in an open space like the Sillon, I do not know."

"Oh, as to that," said Marguerite, "that would be easily managed. Within ten yards of the spot where they fought last night there is a step leading down to the water's edge, and closed on either side. It is called the 'Lovers' Descent'—Claude showed it to me one day—and there we could stand without fear of detection. But I must consider your mad scheme. Could we possibly manage to prevent a catastrophe? And even if we succeeded in doing so, would it not be only a postponement of the issue? They are determined to meet, and we should only make them so much the more determined—to say nothing of my uncle's wrath when he discovers our presence. But then, if what you say of La Pommeraye be true—and my uncle is alone, and no one knows of the meeting—yes, Bastienne, I am here. What is it?"

She interrupted herself at the entrance of a short, thick-set woman, considerably past middle-age—evidently a privileged old servant. There was no mistaking her origin. She was a peasant of Picardy, faithful, honest, good-natured, and strong as an ox. She had been in the service of De Roberval's family all her life; and once, by her courage and devotion, had actually saved his castle when it was besieged by the Spaniards. They had forced their way to the very gates, and had built a huge fire against the door of the tower, whence the defenders had fled in terror, when Bastienne seized a keg of powder, and dropped it fairly into the midst of the fire, round which the soldiers stood waiting till the great oaken doors should be burned away. The castle shook to its foundations, and the courtyard

was strewn with the dead and the dying. The advance was checked; De Roberval's men rallied, rushed from the castle, and won a glorious victory against overwhelming numbers. Bastienne herself was badly shaken by the explosion, and terrified half to death at her own daring. To the end of her days she fancied herself haunted by the spirits of the unhappy Spaniards whom she had sent to such a fearful end.

She stood in the doorway, panting from the exertion of coming up the stairs in unusual haste.

"Ma'amselle," she exclaimed, in what she meant to be a muffled tone, as she came towards the girls with a mysterious air of having some thing of importance to communicate, "I fear there is trouble in store. As I passed the Sieur de Roberval's room just now I saw him making fierce passes with the sword that hangs above the boar's head. If he is not possessed of the Devil"—and she crossed herself hurriedly—"he must be getting ready for a duel, and at his age, too! Heaven have mercy on us all if anything should happen to him! What is to be done?"

"If he is practising with that famous blade," said Marguerite, turning to Marie with a confident smile, "your friend will have need of all his skill to disarm him. It is a magnificent Toledo, and has never known defeat. But as you say," and her face clouded again, "we must do what we can to prevent a fatal ending to the duel. Bastienne, be ready to accompany me at nine o'clock to-night. And say nothing to any one of what you have seen. Your master has probably good reasons for whatever he may do, and he would be very indignant if he thought that any one had been observing his actions."

The old woman, rebuked, left the room, murmuring to herself as she went, and the two girls proceeded to lay their plans.

A little before the appointed hour that evening, having taken old Bastienne into their confidence, they secretly left the house, and made their way to the place of rendezvous, which, as has been said, was but a short distance away. All three were soon established in the cramped and narrow little stairway which Marguerite had

described, and waited with no small trepidation the arrival of the contestants.

It was difficult to keep Bastienne quiet. A bright moon was shining in a clear sky, and a gentle breeze crept in from the Channel, cold and piercing. The younger women scarcely felt it; but Bastienne's old bones ached, according to her, as they had never ached before. However, by dint of threats and entreaties, they succeeded in silencing her; and none too soon, for a brisk step was heard approaching, and the next moment a gay voice soliloquised close beside them:

"By the light of the moon I should say I had arrived a little early. Time for reflection, however. It is always well to give a thought to one's chances in the next world just before a fight."

As he spoke he took his stand within a few feet of where the girls were concealed, and began his reflections on the world at whose portals he was standing, by trolling a gay drinking song. When it was finished he recklessly dashed into a Spanish ditty, commemorating the defeat of King Francis at Pavia. In this he was interrupted by an angry voice at his elbow:

"A pleasing pastime for a son of France—to sing the glory of her foes!"

"So ho!" replied La Pommeraye cheerfully, "Monsieur's anger has not yet cooled. I had never a thought of the words—it was the air that carried me away, and, perhaps, the fine description the song gives of King Francis' stand on that fatal day. No one joys in and yet regrets that fight more than I do. I won my spurs in it, and I am here to defend them to-night. But how does the fair one on whose account we meet? 'Tis a pity she should not be here to witness her lover's doughty deeds a second time."

"Villain!" came the indignant answer, "before you utter any further insults, know that you speak of Mdlle. de Roberval, my niece, whose name your vile lips are not worthy so much as to pronounce. Draw, and defend your life!"

"I trust the Sieur de Roberval will pardon my error," said La Pommeraye, drawing back with a bow, while his whole air changed to one of respectful deference. "Had I known the circumstances, I should not have been so ready to offer you the second contest. In the light of the moon I mistook your years. Your skill with the sword is, I am aware, justly renowned, but my youth and strength give me the advantage. Accept my humble apologies, Sieur, and let us end this quarrel without blows. I will leave St Malo at once, and you shall not be reminded by my presence of this most unfortunate affair."

The nobleman's voice was fairly choked with rage.

"Draw, coward!" he hissed. "It is not enough that you must insult, in the person of an unprotected girl, the oldest name in France, but you dare to taunt with age and unskilfulness a man whose sword is dishonoured by being crossed with yours. Were my age thrice what it is, my arm would still have strength to defend the honour of my house. Stand on your guard!" As he spoke, he made a fierce and sudden lunge, which would have taken a less wary opponent by surprise, and ended the duel on the spot.

It was met and parried, and a cool, steady counter-thrust severed the cord of the cloak about De Roberval's shoulders.

"You fight at a disadvantage with that cloak about you, Sieur. I have removed it," said La Pommeraye, with no scorn in his voice, but with a calm self-possession which told De Roberval that he was indeed in the hands of an opponent for whom he was no match.

CHAPTER III

Had the two combatants not been so deeply absorbed in their own affairs at this juncture, they could not have failed to discover the presence of the three women; for at the sight of her master at the mercy of his opponent, as she supposed, Bastienne forgot her caution, and could not suppress a scream. Further demonstrations on her part, however, were instantly nipped in the bud—if one can use the expression with reference to Bastienne's good Picard mouth—by a prompt and determined application of her mistress's hand. Marguerite's quick eye had seen that her uncle was still uninjured; and at all hazards the secret of their hiding-place must not be revealed. She held Bastienne firmly till she felt the old servant's lips tighten under her hand, in sign of submission to the inevitable; and then, with a whispered warning, and without releasing her grip on the woman's arm, she turned her whole attention once more to the scene before them. Marie, in the meantime, had never taken her eyes from La Pommeraye, and was following his every movement with breathless interest.

The two men stood foot to foot, eye to eye, watching each other as only trained swordsmen can watch. Back and forth they swayed in the clear light of the moon, their swords clashing and singing as they parried or thrust. De Roberval's face, wrinkled and hard at any time, had now an expression of diabolical hate. He was as pale as the walls of the houses in the moonlight, and his eyes glowed with a murderous fire. He seemed reckless of his life, and savagely thrust at his opponent every time any part of his body was left unguarded.

It was otherwise with La Pommeraye. Confident of victory, he smiled calmly at the other's rage, occasionally darting in a straight thrust at some part of his antagonist's body, that told Roberval how entirely he was in the good-natured giant's power. The moonlight, that made the old man's face cold and stony, seemed to illuminate with warmth the handsome features of the younger.

Roberval noted the smile as the moonlight shone full upon La Pommeraye, and his fury increased. Fiercely he flew at him, and thrust with the dexterity which had made him the most

distinguished swordsman among the nobles of France. La Pommeraye had to move with lightning swiftness to avoid a wound; and once, indeed, he felt a stinging sensation near his heart, and knew by the warmth at his side that blood was flowing.

It would not do to trifle longer. As if a whirlwind had entered his arm, his weapon flashed hither and thither with such rapidity that Roberval forgot his hate, and thought only of keeping off the attack. But it was useless. Once, twice, thrice, he was touched, touched so lightly that no blood was drawn, and just as he was about to lower his sword to his generous opponent, who was evidently playing with him, he caught a look in La Pommeraye's eye that told him he was once more about to attempt disarming him.

Such a disgrace and humiliation must be averted. He braced himself for the struggle. He determined if possible to bind his antagonist's blade. But to no avail. The trick was an old one, and ordinarily an easy one to outwit; but the arm that now practised it was a giant's. De Roberval vainly tried to hold his sword. His wrist seemed suddenly to burn and crack, and a circle of light flashed before his eyes. It was his sword, torn from his grasp, and hurled over the wall into the water. A quivering silver arc marked the spot where it had gone down. La Pommeraye stood with the same imperturbable air as before. He was smiling as only a victor can, but there was neither scorn nor pity in the smile.

"It shall never be told me that I was beaten," said Roberval impetuously, as he snatched a jewel-hilted dagger from his girdle.

"Hold your hand," said La Pommeraye, sternly, as he saw the frenzied man direct the weapon towards his own breast. "Put up that toy, and be a man. You have been fairly beaten, as has every one who has crossed swords with me. It is no disgrace; but no one shall know what has passed here to-night unless from your own lips."

But his words came too late. The dagger, flashing downwards, struck the breast of the infatuated man, who fell apparently lifeless.

A wild scream rang out from behind the wall. It was Bastienne, no longer to be restrained. But neither Marguerite nor Marie heeded her now, for both had rushed to the side of the prostrate swordsman.

He had fallen forward on his face, and Marguerite flung herself upon his body. La Pommeraye had seen men die before; he had killed a few in his day, both on the field of battle and in single combat; but never before had he had the same stirring of conscience that he now experienced at the spectacle of this beautiful girl overcome by the sorrow he had brought upon her. But his weakness was only for a moment.

"Mademoiselle," he said, approaching, "perhaps we may still be able to do something for your uncle. His wound may not be fatal."

He bent over to assist her to rise, but she was on her feet unaided, and drew back from him with the one scornful word she had flung at him the night before, "Coward!"

La Pommeraye stooped over the lifeless figure at his feet. As he turned it reverently over he noticed that there was no mark of a death-struggle on the limbs or face. Death seemed to have taken sudden hold. But no! he felt the heart, it still beat! The dagger had never pierced the breast! His eye suddenly caught the jewel-hilted weapon lying on the ground.

"Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, seizing it joyfully, "your uncle has only fainted. Here is his dagger untarnished with his blood."

He held it out to where she had been standing a moment before, but she had disappeared, and in her place stood De Pontbriand.

"I am glad to hear you say that," remarked the latter. "It would have been a severe blow to his niece had he fallen by your sword."

A groan told that De Roberval was recovering. If La Pommeraye was a good swordsman, he was an equally cheerful liar. He realised fully how deeply Roberval was stung by the disgrace of his defeat.

"There was little danger of his falling before my sword," he said; "his cloak, which had been cast on the ground, became entangled

with his feet, and he fell; and rather than give an opponent the satisfaction of saying he had spared his life, he drew his dagger, as I should have done under similar circumstances, and would have ended his own existence, but the hand of Providence has in some strange manner intervened."

He was still kneeling beside the fallen man, and somewhat to his surprise he felt his hand clutched and pressed, showing that his explanation had been understood and accepted.

De Roberval was soon completely restored to consciousness. He attempted to rise, but when he put his right hand on the ground he fell back with a groan. La Pommeraye saw in an instant what was wrong. The strength of his effort to disarm De Roberval had broken one of his wrist bones.

"Sieur," he said, "you must have fallen heavily, your wrist is broken."

Such was the case, and it was a fortunate mishap for the House of Roberval. It was this that saved his life. He had drawn his dagger, raised it for the blow, but in the process of bringing it down he had twisted the broken wrist so severely that the sudden pain had caused him to lose consciousness, and the dagger, barely touching his breast, fell beneath him in the dust.

"Monsieur, let me help you to your feet," said La Pommeraye, and, as he spoke, placed his strong arm under the reclining nobleman, and raised him as if he had been a babe.

De Roberval was as one in a dream. He seemed hardly to realise what had happened until he saw Cartier and Pontbriand standing by.

"What brings you here?" he almost shouted.

"We heard a woman's scream," replied Cartier, "and fearing that some unfortunate fair one had met with a mishap, we rushed to the rescue."

"A woman's scream! What woman?" and De Roberval looked hastily round; but the three women had discreetly disappeared.

Before he could say aught further he was interrupted by La Pommeraye, who gallantly came up, and, holding out an unsheathed sword, said: "Let me, Monsieur, present you with your weapon, which you lost when you so unfortunately slipped on your cloak."

It was a lie, and De Roberval's look showed that he was aware of it. Possibly he was dimly conscious of having already committed himself by his silence to his generous opponent's explanation, or his wounded vanity may have been too strong to allow him to confess his humiliation before the other two men; at all events he replied, with an attempt at dignity: "I thank you, Monsieur, but you must sheathe it for me, as my right hand is helpless."

Without a word La Pommeraye raised the sheath, and drove the blade home.

"You are generous," said De Roberval, "and I hope you may learn to be as honourable as you are generous. I am wounded, and will soon recover; but the kiss that burns on my niece's cheek is a wound from which she will never recover."

At the words a sword flashed from its scabbard, and De Pontbriand stood fierce and defiant before his friend.

"So!" he shouted, "it was Marguerite de Roberval you dared to kiss—you, whose lips are polluted with the kisses of a thousand light-o'-loves! Draw, and defend yourself!"

"Draw, Claude! Never!" and he drew his cloak more closely about him, so as not to let it be seen that he was unarmed. "Never, Claude. Friend in love, friend in war, friend in death, even if that friend give the blow. Strike if you will; I have done dishonourably, and no hand is so worthy to punish dishonour as the hand of Claude de Pontbriand."

"Enough of this," interrupted De Roberval. "Put up your sword, De Pontbriand. He has apologised, and I accept his explanation. The whole affair arose from a mistake. It would be well, however," he

added, turning to Charles, "if this would teach you a lesson on the unmanliness of assaulting every unprotected woman you may happen to meet. But where," and he checked himself suddenly, and threw a piercing glance round him, "is the woman whose scream you heard? Has there been any one else here?"

"We were some little distance away, Sieur," said De Pontbriand, "when we heard the scream, and when we came out into the open there certainly seemed to be a number of figures here, three of whom disappeared on our approach into the shadow of yonder wall; and when I turned to look for them, there was no one to be seen."

The fact was that Marie's quick eye had caught sight of the two men as they emerged into the moonlight and came towards them, and, like a flash, she had drawn the other two women into the shadow of the wall. The instant they recognised the voices, knowing that all was safe, and in terror of being discovered, the two girls seized each an arm of old Bastienne, and taking advantage of the momentary surprise caused by Claude's discovery of the identity of Charles' opponent, had made their way back to the nearest street, with a speed to which the old serving-woman's legs were totally unaccustomed, and never rested till they had landed her, breathless and panting, at the door of their own house.

Charles, in the meantime, discreetly held his peace. He might have imagined that he had dreamt the whole scene had not De Pontbriand been able to vouch for the scream. At all events there was now no trace of the three women to be seen, and after a thorough examination of every possible spot where so much as a mouse might have been concealed, they gave up the search. De Roberval looked a little perturbed.

"You must have been mistaken," he said to Claude. "There certainly cannot have been anyone here. At all events," he went on, "the affair must now be considered at an end. De Pontbriand, you must get into no quarrels. We shall have need of all our good men if we embark upon this Canadian expedition, which I have now in mind."

"Good, good!" cried Cartier, tossing his cap in the air like a schoolboy. "Up with your sword, Claude, and let us get our old

friend to join us; we shall have need of him. And, La Pommeraye, beware of bringing down on you the wrath of your friends. It is easy to fight enemies, but he who makes an enemy of his friend loses something he can never regain. To-morrow, then, let us meet and talk over our plans."

In a few minutes the group had separated. Cartier and De Pontbriand escorted Roberval to his home, while La Pommeraye turned his footsteps away from the city, and towards the broad, moonlit fields. He was restless and disturbed. The image of Marguerite de Roberval haunted his brain, and he could not get rid of an uneasy impression that Claude's eagerness to defend her honour had something more behind it than mere chivalrous gallantry. Then, too, how came she so suddenly upon the scene of the conflict? and whither had she disappeared? He walked all night, not caring whither, absorbed in pondering over the mysterious circumstances which surrounded the beautiful girl who had made so strong an impression on his imagination; and the first faint streak of dawn found him back at the spot where the fight had taken place. Looking idly over the wall his eye caught the gleam of De Roberval's sword full fifteen feet below the surface of the clear water. No one was about. In a moment he was stripped. He took one quick plunge, and the next instant the sword was in his hand. When he returned to the city, he waited till it was full day, and then with eager steps proceeded to the house whither he had borne the unconscious form of Marguerite two nights before. Hammering on the door, he waited, uncertain what to say or do, and timid as a schoolboy for the first time in his life. The old, crusty servant who opened the door, curtly informed him that his master was still in bed.

"Tell him," he said, "that Charles de la Pommeraye wishes to see him in his own room if possible."

In a moment the servant returned, and, guiding him through a long and dark hall, brought him to a chamber hung with trophies of the fight. On a couch in the centre, overhung with heavy curtains, lay De Roberval, haggard and worn, having evidently passed a sleepless night.

"Go, Jean," he said, waving his hand to his servant.

When the door was closed La Pommeraye advanced, and bowing, said: "Monsieur must pardon my visit, but I have fished up his sword, and thought it best to bring it to him at once. Ah, I see mine on the floor! It has not often had such treatment; but it was used in a dishonourable quarrel and deserves dishonour."

As he spoke he took it up lovingly and placed it in its sheath.

The tears were in the eyes of De Roberval as he took his loved blade in his left hand, but his voice was hard and cold.

"I thank you, Monsieur," he frigidly replied. "You add one more to the obligations under which you have already placed me."

La Pommeraye saw what an effort it had cost the nobleman to make even this slight admission. It was like swallowing the bitterest hemlock to acknowledge his debt to the man who had vanquished him, and whose generosity had shielded him from disgrace. The young adventurer was shrewd enough to see that if he would win favour with the uncle of Marguerite he must wound his vanity and pride no further. He felt that it would be wise to withdraw, and, after expressing in a few words his regret for the thoughtlessness which had been the cause of the unfortunate affair, he was about to leave the room, when De Roberval called him back.

"Stay," he said, "I have fought many battles, but last night I fought with the most honourable, if the most thoughtless, man in France. This afternoon at four o'clock Cartier and De Pontbriand meet with me to consider the expedition to Canada. Join us in our councils; we cannot but be benefited by the experience and courage of so distinguished a soldier, and one so well acquainted with the New World."

La Pommeraye bowed his acknowledgment, and found himself once more in the streets where life was just beginning to stir. He was soon at the inn to which for years he had resorted when in St Malo, and after a breakfast that would have satisfied Goliath himself, he went to his room to snatch forty winks to brace and refresh him for further adventures.

CHAPTER IV

A few minutes before the hour designated by Roberval, La Pommeraye appeared in front of the house, which had now become a kind of magnet for his feet. As a general thing his careless nature made him unpunctual, and he had not infrequently kept opponents waiting for him when he had a duel on hand. To-night, however, he hoped for a glimpse of Marguerite, and this made him prompt to keep his appointment. He scanned the windows as he passed along the opposite side of the street, but no one appeared to meet his eager gaze. With a heart palpitating like a schoolboy's, on whom some fair girl has smiled or frowned, he slowly retraced his steps to the heavy oaken door. His knock was answered by the same old servant who had admitted him in the morning, and he was shown into a large but very plainly furnished room, where De Roberval sat before a table covered with papers and charts. The walls of the room were hung with pictures of the hunt, of the battle-field, and of religious subjects—the brutality of war strangely ranged side by side with the gentle Madonna and the gentler Christ. In one corner stood a statue of Bacchus, in another was a skull and cross-bones. Trophies of the hunt were scattered here and there; and a pair of crossed swords surmounted an ivory crucifix which hung above a well-worn *prie-dieu*.

"Vanity and ambition," said La Pommeraye to himself as he glanced round the room.

The words well summed up De Roberval's character. He would have no man in the nation greater than himself. When the famous meeting took place at "The Field of the Cloth of Gold," between Ardres and Guines in Picardy, all the nobles made an effort to rival the splendour of their kings, Henry VIII. and Francis I., and they came to the meeting, as Martin du Bellay has said, "bearing thither their mills, their forests, and their meadows on their backs." Among them all Jean François de la Roque, Sieur de Roberval, was the most resplendent. Small in stature, he was handicapped in the use of the sword; but by patient practice he had made up for this deficiency, and had won for himself the name of the most skilled swordsman in

France. This reputation he had maintained against all comers till he met the man now closeted with him. He envied the King his poetic talent, and would fain have outdone him in the art of poesy. But even with Clement Marot's help he had been utterly unable to woo the fickle muse. He had so stored his mind, however, that his sovereign, the brilliant Marguerite de Nevarre, and the master intellect of that age, Rabelais, all delighted in his society; and on account of his ability in so many directions, and his evident ambition, Francis had humorously christened him "The Little King of Vimeu." One thing rankled in his ambitious heart: king he could not be. Let him be as strong, as intellectual, as popular as he might, Francis could always look down on him from the throne.

Cartier, although a blunt seaman, had read the man's nature truly, and in endeavouring to win him to his cause, had pointed out the opportunity the New World would give him of reigning an absolute monarch over not a province, but a continent of unlimited extent and wealth. Roberval, like a fool gudgeon, caught at the bait, and had in his own mind fully decided to try the venture. But to impress them with his importance he had called De Pontbriand and La Pommeraye to this meeting to argue the matter with them, and to convince them of the sacrifice he was about to make for his country, and of his reluctance to leave old France.

Despite the vanity and ambition of the man, the enthusiasm, courage, and will that De Roberval put into anything that he undertook were admirable qualities, and as La Pommeraye stood looking into his steel-grey eyes, and admiring his smooth high forehead and finely-chiselled mouth, he felt that he was in the presence of a born leader of men.

Roberval acknowledged his greeting with a sternness of manner for which Charles was hardly prepared.

"Monsieur is welcome to my house," he said frigidly. "But why need he have taken so long to decide upon entering? I saw you," he added, fixing his keen glance on the young man, "pass twice on the other side of the street."

The words were simple enough, but the tone told La Pommeraye that there was a world of meaning in them. If he could be ready with the sword he could be equally ready with the tongue.

"Sieur de Roberval," he said, meeting the nobleman's eyes with a frank, straightforward gaze, "I am not dull-witted. I see that you have read the meaning of my action, and even though it call down your anger on my head, I will confess myself to you. Your niece was the cause of my walking past and rudely staring at your windows. I love her, and unless some more favoured suitor has already won her heart, I have vowed to prove myself worthy of her hand, if God wills it."

"Silence!" almost shouted De Roberval. "If God wills it a thousand times, it shall never be. I will oppose it. But why waste words?" he added in a quieter tone. "My niece would spurn you as she would one of Cartier's savages."

"At first, I have no doubt," returned Charles with great suavity. "But, as you say, we waste words. We are met to consult on a great undertaking, and I have told you my intentions that there may be no double-dealing between us. You know me, and you know what I have resolved to do, and if you should not wish to have me join you in this enterprise you can exclude me now. There is plenty of work, or will be soon, for my sword in France, without my taking it to a land where it will only rust in the scabbard."

Before De Roberval could make any reply, a heavy knock resounded through the house, and Cartier's voice was heard enquiring of Jean: "Is your master within?"

"Ay, that he is, Monsieur, but I doubt if he will receive you. Either the Emperor or our beloved King Francis is with him."

"What makes you think that, honest Jean?" said De Pontbriand's voice.

"Why," replied the old servant, "he spoke back to my master! I heard him with my own ears, and I thought that even the King himself would not do that."

"Well, Jean, he has promised to meet with us to-night; so, King or no King, show us to his room."

Not waiting for an answer they pushed towards the door of Roberval's room, which stood slightly ajar. Before they could knock De Roberval threw it open, exclaiming as he did so: "Welcome to our conference."

"Behold the King!" he continued, laughingly pointing to La Pommeraye. "Jean is a strange fellow. I am afraid I should have left him in Picardy; his tongue wags too much. But he is not far wrong this time. The man who could defeat De Roberval is indeed a monarch among men."

There was a steel-like ring in his voice as he spoke; Cartier and De Pontbriand looked at each other, and both wondered what fate he had in store for La Pommeraye.

"But," he continued, "we have much work before us to-night, let us settle down to it at once. I hope, Cartier, you have brought your charts with you, and you, De Pontbriand, your notes."

"We have," said the two men in chorus; "and," added Cartier, "what we have omitted La Pommeraye, who, in search of adventures, wandered about for several months in the primeval forests, will be able to supply."

The four heads were soon assiduously studying a rude map which Cartier had spread on the table. Intently they scanned it: Charles and Claude with the fond remembrance of men who had visited those distant, almost unknown, lands; Cartier with the delight of a man who had before him the continent he had claimed for his King; and Roberval with the eagerness of one who is about to venture on a mighty undertaking that may ruin his fortunes, or make him the most renowned man in his country.

The nobleman's sharp eyes noted the mighty rivers and broad gulfs, feeling that already they were his own. The vastness of the great unknown world took hold on him. The forests of Picardy were like stubble beside these unbroken stretches of wooded country; and the mightiest river of France was but as a purling brook when compared

with the gigantic sweep of the river of Hochelaga, which stretched inland for unknown leagues.

Cartier had been watching his countenance, and saw that he was completely won to the enterprise; but Roberval feigned a lack of enthusiasm. He turned from the map, and with assumed indifference said: "I like not the look of the country. Woods and water, water and woods, are all you have marked on it. I prefer a land of fertile fields and civilised society."

"But, noble Sieur, you mistake. It is not all woods and water. This mighty Baie des Chaleurs teems with fish. We filled our boats as we passed along; and did all Europe take to a fish diet that one bay could supply them. And the woods, Sieur! They swarm with animals. Mink, otter, beaver, fox, are as plentiful there as sheep and goats are with us, and as easily captured. There would be no trouble to get their skins, or time lost in hunting them either. The Indians would bring in pelts by hundreds, and all we should need to give them in return would be a few glass beads, metal rings, leaden images, or some gaudy apparel."

"Enough, enough!" said De Roberval impatiently. "You talk as if you were in the establishment of a St Malo merchant instead of in the house of a nobleman of Picardy."

Claude saw that Cartier had over-shot the mark, and so came to the rescue.

"The Sieur de Roberval," he said, "must pardon good Master Cartier. He has so long been bringing home the wealth of other lands that he is inclined to think of the value of a country by the amount of wealth it can put into the treasury of France."

"A very laudable way of thinking, and one of which good King Francis would be the first to approve," replied the nobleman in a gentler tone.

"Yes," said Claude, "but not the only thing to consider. This commerce gives us the greatest opportunity any people has ever had. The whole New World is steeped in the most degrading paganism. The Indians have no notion of God, or the Blessed Virgin,

or of Christ. And, Sieur, while the treasure from the streams and the forest may bring us reward on earth, the countless souls we may lead to heaven will win us crowns in eternity."

Claude was not a hypocrite. He had begun to speak of the spiritual side of the enterprise with the special purpose of buttressing Cartier's argument; but he was a devout Catholic, and his lips only echoed what was in his heart.

"Pontbriand," replied Roberval, "you plead like a holy father. We shall have to shave your head and give you a black robe. But there is something in what you say; though to propagate Christianity effectively in such a land would require enormous wealth."

"True, most noble Sieur," said Cartier hastily, "and if the forest and the stream do not yield sufficient we must dig it out of the earth."

"What mean you? Have you further information about the mineral wealth of the New World? The last you gave me was of little value. Your precious metal has proved to be less valuable than lead, and your diamonds but quartz. See," he said, rising, "how this acid affects your gold."

He took from a shelf a piece of metal which Cartier had sent to him.

"La Pommeraye," he said, "you will have to be a right hand for me, and uncork this vial."

A drop of the liquid was allowed to fall upon the metal, which at once became discoloured.

"No, no!" exclaimed Roberval. "You will have to try some other bait. I will not go to Canada hoping for gold."

"I do not wish to contradict you, Sieur, but test this lump;" and Cartier, as he spoke, handed him a nugget the size of an egg.

Nervously Roberval seized it. It stood the test.

"Where!" he exclaimed in an excited voice, "did you get this?"

"From Donnacona, of whom you have heard, and whom indeed you have seen for yourself."

"And where did Donnacona get it?"

"Far west of his home at Stadacona, and of Hochelaga, too."

"I must see him at once," said Roberval.

"That will be difficult, Sieur," replied Cartier. "He is in Heaven."

"Dead, is he? Well, what good will that nugget do us?" said Roberval, in disgust and disappointment. "We might search for centuries before we could find its mate."

"True, Sieur, but where one was found there are likely to be others. Besides, I have here something that may help us in our search."

As he spoke he unrolled a precious chart, scratched on birch bark with some rude weapon, such as a flint arrow-head.

"I got this from Donnacona five years ago, and I have kept it from the world till this moment, fearing that calamity might befall it."

He spread it on the table, and on one corner rested the tempting nugget.

It was a marvellous map; the map of an unknown world of wonders.

"I can swear to the truth of this part at least," said Cartier. "This is Hochelaga, and here are marked the difficult rapids above it. These five inland seas are without doubt in existence. Many Indians have told me of them; and see, Sieur, this one is incomplete. Donnacona told me that no Indian had ever reached its end; and yet there are tales among the Indians of richly-robed men of another race and colour who live beyond these vast western waters. I do not like to conjecture in so great an undertaking, but does it not seem probable that we have at last before us the road to the East, and to the Kingdom of the Grand Khan?"

"Enough, enough, Cartier!" said Roberval, laughing. "You are too enthusiastic. What next will you have to offer? Already we have had

furs, fish, timber, gold, silver, precious stones, and Indian souls. You must think I need great temptation to be lured into this enterprise. But what have we here, to the north of this ocean?"

"I am glad you have noticed that," replied Cartier. "Those rude marks are the mines. They are of great antiquity; and Donnacona, who had no idea of the value of the precious metals, spoke of the men of old who dug for metal such as we wore on our fingers, and about our necks. He had a fine scorn for such baubles; and, as if to impress us with their worthlessness, stood on the heights of Stadacona, and pointed with pride to the wigwams of his tribe clustering at the foot of the cliff: 'But,' he said, 'the men who wrought the metal are no more. Mighty oaks grow from the earth in which they toiled.'"

Roberval seemed scarcely to heed this long harangue. He gazed intently at the map, and did not raise his eyes till the voice of La Pommeraye, who had hitherto been silent, broke upon his ear.

"What Cartier has told you, Sieur, is true. I too have heard the same tales from very different sources. But, to my mind, Cartier and De Pontbriand, in advocating their expedition, have left out the most important consideration. Spain is already in the New World. Cortez has brought shiploads of gold from Mexico; Ponce de Leon, Garay, Vasquez de Ayllon, and Hernando de Soto have all brought home tales of treasure and wonder; and if France does not make haste she will find herself one of the least among European Powers. Besides, let us build up a nation in the New World, and we may have some more fighting. The rumours of war that flit up and down in France are mere woman's talk. My blade is rusting in the scabbard, and now that the Emperor and King Francis are complimenting each other like two schoolgirls, it is long likely to remain so. But in the New World there will be a glorious opportunity for a struggle with Spain. The Spaniard already claims the whole of America, and will fight for every inch of it. A strong man could found a mighty empire on the banks of the Hochelaga, and have all the fighting his heart could desire. I should like to be lieutenant to such a man."

"And you shall be," said De Roberval, firmly. "Gentlemen, I have decided. To-morrow I depart to hold an interview with King Francis.

Meet me here in three weeks, and I will report my success. He owes me a heavy debt, and will, I have no doubt, fit out and man a fleet for us, and give me full power over Canada."

The three men rose. Cartier and De Pontbriand made their adieus and left the room; but before La Pommeraye could follow them, the touch of Roberval's hand on his shoulder arrested him. The door closed on the other two, and Roberval, without resuming his seat, remarked, in a not unkindly tone:

"You are a brave youth! I admire your courage, and shall be glad to have you join me in this expedition. But one thing I must have distinctly understood: This romantic attachment you fancy you have conceived for my niece—I must hear no more of it. You have seen her but once, and under circumstances which make it unlikely that you will ever meet her again. Your time will be fully occupied in preparations for our departure; as for her, I shall see that she leaves St Malo at once. Go, now, and prove yourself indeed a man of honour by attempting to see no more of her. I warn you, you will rue the day you cross my will."

The young soldier merely bowed in silence and left the room. As he stepped into the long hall he noticed two figures standing close to each other in the dim light at the farther end. They seemed to be engaged in close conversation. He recognised Claude, and his heart sank within him, for he thought the second figure was Marguerite. De Roberval was following close behind him, and, with a generous impulse to shield his friend, Charles placed his giant proportions immediately in front of the little nobleman. But when they reached the street door he was rejoiced to find Marie standing there, apparently bidding good-bye to Claude.

"Where is Marguerite?" said De Roberval sternly.

"In her room, Sieur."

"I thought I saw her here a moment ago."

"You must have mistaken me for her, Sieur," replied Marie, unhesitatingly, "as I but this moment left her."

"Strange," thought La Pommeraye, as the two young men left the house together, "that we should both have made the same mistake; but doubtless we were both thinking of her. But that fair damsel in the hall is not the style of beauty by which I should have thought Claude would be attracted. However, so much the better for me. The coast is now clear, I hope."

"Claude," he said, after they had walked a little distance in silence, "I saw you as I came out into the hall. You seemed to be holding a very absorbing conversation with that fair lady—a friend of Mdlle de Roberval's, I conclude. May I be permitted to ask her name?"

Claude did not answer for a few moments, and La Pommeraye noticed that his face wore an expression of anxiety and doubt. At length he said:

"That is Mdlle de Vignan—the Sieur de Roberval's ward. She lives with him, and is the constant companion of his niece."

"Marie de Vignan?" exclaimed Charles. "The daughter of Aubrey de Vignan who was killed in action five years ago?"

"The same."

"I would I had known it was she! Yet how could I recognise her?—I have not seen her since I held her in my arms, a mischievous little elf of five years old, when I used to be a constant visitor at her father's house. It was a second home to me—indeed, more of a home than I have ever known elsewhere, before or since. And that is my little friend and playmate! I congratulate you, Claude. If she has inherited anything of her father's nature and her mother's sweetness she will be indeed a jewel."

To his surprise Claude made no reply; and the two friends walked on in silence. La Pommeraye asked no more questions, and his friend was evidently not desirous of volunteering any further information. They shortly overtook Cartier, who was waiting for them, and the incident was forgotten for the present in the discussion of their plans for the proposed voyage.

CHAPTER V

Three weary weeks dragged themselves along. Cartier was all impatience for definite information about the King's attitude towards the Canadian expedition, while Charles and Claude were both eager, for reasons of their own, for the return of De Roberval's niece and his ward, whom he had taken to Fontainebleau with him. The three weeks lengthened into a fourth, the fourth into a fifth, and the adventurers were beginning to despair, when the faithful Jean appeared at the inn where Charles and his friend were lodged, bearing a note from his master.

De Roberval had returned, and success had crowned his efforts. The King had given him full power to make preparations—but they must come to him at once to receive instructions, and hear from his own lips the generosity of their noble monarch.

Eagerly the two young men hurried to tell Cartier the good news; and the three proceeded to Roberval's house, where they found him in high spirits. He had received more than he had asked. Anne de Montmorency had been with the King, and a friendship which had been begun at "The Field of the Cloth of Gold" had made him an ardent supporter of the little nobleman from Picardy.

The King was won to the glorious cause of extending French territory, and of winning souls. He bade Roberval return to St Malo, hurry on his preparations, collect his crews, and await his official commission, which would follow him as soon as the necessary legal proceedings could be gone through. In the meantime a letter signed by the King's own hand gave him all the power he needed.

"You are about to settle a new world for France," he had said to Roberval; "our right of colonisation is firmly established there, and the sword and the cross will make us strong. To keep you bold in arms, and firm in the faith, I present you with this sword which the saintly Bayard laid upon my shoulders with the words: 'He who has been crowned, consecrated, and anointed with oil sent down from Heaven, he who is the eldest son of the Church, is knight over all other knights'—and with this golden cross, which encases a

fragment of the true cross—these dints on it are from Spanish blows; thrice did it save my life on the field of Pavia of unhappy memories—with this talisman you may hope to succeed in the great land of Norembega."

The three enthusiastic listeners congratulated him on his success, but without heeding them he went on: "That is not all. Hear the substance of this letter, signed with his royal hand. A fleet is to be fitted out at once; the governors of all the provinces are to aid in securing arms; and I"—the little nobleman seemed to grow several inches as he uttered the words—"I am created Lord of Norembega, Viceroy and Lieutenant-General in Canada, Hochelaga, Saguenay, Newfoundland, Belle Isle, Carpunt, Labrador, the Great Bay, and Baccalaos."

As he rolled off this imposing list of titles La Pommeraye's sense of humour got the better of him. The rugged, uninviting land which he knew so well rose vividly before him; and the high-sounding terms which were heaped upon it in no way lessened its ruggedness. He turned to Roberval, and with a merry twinkle in his blue eye exclaimed: "King Francis is truly generous, most noble Sieur de Nor—you must pardon a soldier's tongue and memory; I shall have to shorten your titles—Sieur of the Universe; but there are difficulties in the way. I have sounded the fishermen and sailors of St Malo, and none seem willing to cross the stormy Atlantic as settlers. If we could lure them across for fish, or furs, or gold, it would be well; but all dread the fierce cold and the scurvy to which so many of their companions have already succumbed."

"It matters not," said Roberval; "I have full power to raise men, and the sturdy beggars—and, if all other resources fail, the denizens of our prisons—shall be forced on board my vessels."

"Sieur, that will be a dangerous experiment," interrupted Cartier. "I had three criminals with me on my last voyage, and they poisoned the minds of nearly every other man on the ship."

"You forget," said Roberval, "that I am commander in this expedition. An iron hand falls upon the man who disobeys my slightest wish. Criminals are but men; and they will find that no

ordinary turnkey watches over them. But why borrow troubles? Let us to work and build our ships, get the stores on board, and man them, and the other difficulties can then be faced. We have three ships now, Master Cartier. Set your carpenters to work on two others at once, and build them with particular reference to the Atlantic passage and the dangers from the ice. You had better consult with Jehan Alfonse. You are both skilled seamen, and what one overlooks the other will be sure to provide for."

He then proceeded to intrust to Claude the task of superintending the purchase of supplies. Enough provision would be needed for three hundred men for a year at least; and it would be necessary to see that everything could be hurried into St Malo at a moment's notice.

"And you, M. de la Pommeraye," he added, turning to Charles, "as you seem to have already taken it upon yourself to seek men for this expedition, have my authority to go into every vessel in the harbour, or in any harbour in France, and offer the men double their present wage; and if that will not induce them, go to the prisons and select such men as you think fit. You know a man when you see him; and this letter with the King's seal will open the prison gates before you. For myself, I must away to Picardy to set my estate in order. I shall return with all possible speed; meantime spare no efforts to hasten our preparations."

So the three men were dismissed, and as Claude and Charles were about to leave the house they looked stealthily round the hall. But no flutter of skirts nor any trace of woman's occupation rewarded them. Roberval noticed their glances, and as he bade them farewell he said, somewhat roughly: "St Malo is a dangerous place for women. I have left my niece at Court. If our great undertaking is to succeed, nothing must be allowed to distract our attention from our plans. No other cares must be allowed to interfere with our sole object in view—to increase the glory and renown of our beloved country."

The three men passed into the narrow streets, each absorbed in his own reflections. Cartier saw in imagination his name on the pages of history, next to that of Columbus. Claude had but one immediate end in view—to plan how he might extend his expeditions for

supplies as far as Fontainebleau, while as for Charles, since the only way to reach Marguerite appeared to be by winning the good opinion of her uncle, he resolved, as a first step in that direction, to devote his whole energies to the task he had in hand.

Winter swiftly passed, spring lengthened to summer; summer was on the wane, and still the New World seemed no nearer. The ships were completed, and the empty hulls rode in the harbour of St Malo awaiting supplies and arms. But the money promised by the King was not forthcoming; and Cartier reluctantly prepared to spend another winter in old France. The prisons of St Malo were crowded to overflowing with criminals for the voyage; for only a few hardy adventurers had been secured by La Pommeraye. In August Roberval paid a flying visit to his fleet, inspected the vessels and men, and expressed himself strongly on the slowness of the King in keeping his promise. It would be useless to start for America during the autumn months; so he made up his mind to pay a second visit to Fontainebleau, see what could be done in view of the following spring, and take his niece and ward back to Picardy with him for the winter.

While he was in St Malo his steps were dogged, unknown to him, by a swarthy young mariner who had been engaged for the voyage. He had a French name, but a Spanish face; and Cartier, meeting him one day in the street, exclaimed: "Pamphilo de Narvaez, or his ghost!"

"I have been twice mistaken for that Spaniard, whose name I never heard till I came to this place," said the young man. "My name is Narcisse Belleau. Narvaez' bones lie at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico—at least so M. de la Pommeraye told me when he engaged me for this voyage."

"A most remarkable resemblance!" returned Cartier. "I would as soon have the Devil on board *La Grande Hermine* as De Narvaez. Be sure, young man, you join one of the other vessels. Belleau is your name, you say? A good name, but a Narvaez face!"

As he turned away the young Spaniard, for such he was, chuckled to himself: "A good name, indeed! And you and your fellows will rue the day you ever looked upon this face."

He was in very truth Pamphilo de Narvaez, a son of the famous sailor of that name, and had been sent as a spy from the Spanish Court to discover if the rumours of a mighty expedition being fitted out to occupy the New World—Spain's peculiar property—were true. Seeing that Roberval was the soul of the undertaking, he determined to bide his time, strike him down, and save Spain a bloody war in America. He learned that Roberval meant to visit Fontainebleau, and from there to set out with his niece for Picardy. A meeting on the road, with a few dare-devils to aid him, would end the expedition and win him honours and prosperity on his return to Spain.

So he planned; and when he had succeeded he would go to America and finish the work of exploration begun by his illustrious father.

In the meantime Claude and Charles, committing their stores and prisoners to the charge of Cartier, left St Malo, neither telling the other whither he was bound. By different roads, and almost simultaneously, they turned their horses' heads towards Paris; both hoping to meet Roberval and his party as they passed through that city on their way to their northern home. They reached their destination without encountering each other, took lodgings in adjoining streets, and, each unconscious of the other's presence, set out to make enquiries as to when the nobleman might be expected. Had they had long to wait they must have met; but one November day, very shortly after their arrival, a gay crowd of riders came galloping through the streets of the city. Their fluttering pennants, their nodding plumes, their gorgeous doublets and richly-ornamented cloaks, their finely damascened arms, studded with jewels, and their horses, as richly caparisoned as themselves, all told that they had come from the fashionable world of the Court at Fontainebleau.

Such was indeed the case; they had come to escort De Roberval and his household thus far on their northward way. The two young men learned where Roberval was to pass the night, and also that he intended to depart early the following morning, and each returned to his rooms, determined to be up with the lark in order to obtain at least a glimpse of the fair lady who had drawn him to Paris.

But Roberval was up before them; and armed from head to heel, and with a bodyguard of a few sturdy Picards, had already left the city. Claude was the first to reach the nobleman's headquarters, and, on learning of Roberval's departure only a few moments before, set spurs to his horse, hoping to overtake him before he could get clear of the walls. On arriving at the gate, however, he learned that the party had already passed through. There were three roads which would lead them to the ancient and renowned castle which frowned down upon the fruitful plains between the Bresle and the Somme. The nobleman had selected the longest route, but the safest in those troublous times. Claude paused for a few moments to consider this information. He, too, was fully armed, and wore a breastplate of steel beneath his riding cloak. His splendid figure, and the magnificent manner in which he sat his horse, caused some remark among the guards at the gate, of whom he made his enquiries. His resolution was soon taken. He decided to follow by the western and rougher road, which merged into the other at a distance of some miles. He would thus gain a point in advance of Roberval, after a few hours' hard riding, then he would at least have the satisfaction of forming one of the escort as far as the castle.

He set out accordingly; and scarcely was he out of sight when a second rider came up to the gates. When he found that he was too late even for a sight of his goddess, Charles had impulsively started in pursuit, though what he hoped to gain even if he did succeed in overtaking her, guarded as she was, he had no definite idea. The sentinel whom he questioned told him the direction Roberval had taken, and added the further information that a single horseman had but just ridden in hot haste after him, by a different route. A suspicion instantly flashed through Charles' mind, and the description of Claude furnished by the man left no doubt as to the rider's identity. Without stopping to consider the wisdom of his course—thinking only of Marguerite, whom he could not hope to see once she was behind those battlemented walls—Charles turned his horse, and galloped off by the third of the three roads mentioned. It was a shorter cut than either of the other two, but one which few travellers ever took, as every mile had witnessed some deed of violence from the bands of robbers who haunted it.

Roberval and his party made their way leisurely along the dusty road they had chosen, while the two young men rode with fevered haste along their less frequented paths. Towards noon the three were rapidly converging towards the same point, at which they would arrive almost simultaneously.

Claude, who was mounted on a swift charger, which had more than once carried him to victory in a tournament, was the first to reach this point. Scanning the ground he noted that no cavalcade had as yet passed that way. As he sat his horse and waited, the measured galloping of hoofs coming towards Paris fell upon his ears. He did not wish to meet strangers, so withdrew into a thick grove at one side of the road. Scarcely was he concealed when half a dozen hard riders, well horsed and armed at every point, drew rein at the very spot where he had first checked his steed. They surveyed the road hurriedly, and at a word from their leader plunged into a thicket at the opposite side.

"There is trouble in store for some one," said Claude to himself. "If I am not much mistaken, the leader of that gang of cut-throats is none other than Narcisse Belleau, whom, despite his good French and vehement protestations, I believe to be a Spanish spy. And now to my dagger and sword; I may need them. I would La Pommeraye were only here to lend his eye and arm to the coming struggle."

Scarcely had he finished examining his weapons when a cloud of dust slowly advancing in the distance told him that a party of considerable size was on its way towards the ambuscade. He anxiously awaited their approach, and soon recognised Roberval's Picard escort, and the fluttering skirts of the women. If the men in ambush were waiting for them they were doomed, unless he could warn them. To pass from his hiding meant almost instant death, but it must be risked; so he began slowly to make his way towards the road, and was soon at the very edge of the grove. When De Roberval was within a hundred yards he put spurs to his horse, which, seeming to scent danger, made a dash forward past the lurking-place of the assassins. The Spaniard and his comrades were so taken by surprise that for a moment they did not realise his intentions; but De Narvaez, with an oath, exclaimed: "It is De Pontbriand; shoot the

dog down!" Their petronels rang out, but the clumsy weapons shot wide of the mark, and in a trice Claude was with his friends, who, alarmed by the firing, and the wild rush of the approaching rider, had come to a sudden standstill. Before they had time to question De Pontbriand the Spaniards were upon them, and with fierce shouts and drawn swords dashed into the group which now formed a protecting body about Marguerite, Marie, and Bastienne. There was a sudden checking of careering steeds, a clashing of weapons, a heavy falling of wounded men, and three of De Roberval's party and one of the foe lay in the dust. As De Narvaez shot past he placed his petronel against his breast and fired point blank at De Roberval, but quick-witted Bastienne, who saw his intention, struck her master's horse on the nose, and the animal, careering wildly, received the contents of the charge in the heart. The Spaniards rapidly returned to the attack. There were now but five of them opposed to the three Picards who remained with Claude and Roberval, and they expected an easy victory. Two of the Picards fell before their attack, and De Roberval himself was struck down by a fierce sabre blow which dinted his helmet. Claude found himself hard pressed by two of the ruffians at once. It must end in a moment.

But the shots which had been fired attracted a traveller who was always eager for a fray. Just at the critical moment La Pommeraye's horse turned the bend in the road. His accustomed eye took in the state of affairs at once. His sword leaped from its sheath, and with an energy which he seldom needed to exert he braced himself for the struggle. He was upon Claude's assailants in an instant; one quick thrust and a burly Spaniard fell forward on his face. The weapon seemed scarcely to have touched the man, so quickly was it withdrawn; and with the same motion that drew it forth La Pommeraye sent it crashing through the helmet of the other ruffian. De Narvaez and his two companions saw that they were foiled, and, striking fiercely at Claude, who fell beneath their united blows, they turned to flee. But they had lost a second too much. That last blow was their ruin. Charles was upon them like a whirlwind. His sword flashed like a destroying sunbeam, and two others fell lifeless on the road, while their steeds galloped wildly away. De Narvaez turned to face his foe; and his dark face blanched beneath the fierce eye of the French giant. It was but a moment. Charles crossed swords with

him; once, twice—and as if he had been saying "One, two three, die!" he plunged his blade through and through the body of the spy.

"Hot work, but glorious!" he exclaimed, as the Spaniard fell heavily in the dust. "Five in as many minutes. But I must look to my friends."

Bastienne was sitting with her master's head in her lap. Marie had taken off Claude's helmet and revealed a ghastly wound on the temple. Marguerite stood beside her horse, shading her eyes with her hand, her face tense and strained as she watched the issue of the combat. It was not till the victor, flushed but triumphant, his gay riding-suit covered with blood and dust, advanced, and doffing his hat almost to the ground bowed low before her, that she recognised La Pommeraye.

"Mademoiselle is uninjured, I trust?" said Charles.

The blood had mounted to her cheek as she saw in their preserver her rude assailant of nearly a year before, but she kept the quiet dignity of her manner. Drawing off one glove she held out her hand, saying as she did so:

"Monsieur, under God we owe you all our lives. But for your timely appearance, what would have become of three defenceless women when my uncle fell?"

The delicate fingers lay for a moment in La Pommeraye's mighty grasp, as he raised them reverently to his lips, hardly believing in his own good fortune. They were instantly withdrawn, however, and Marguerite hastened to her uncle's side.

De Roberval was only stunned, and might safely be left to Bastienne's skill. It was otherwise with Claude. The wound was a severe one, as Charles instantly recognised.

"Pardon me," he said to Marie, who, less self-controlled than Marguerite, had given way, once the crisis had passed, and was weeping hysterically, "pardon me, Mademoiselle, but I must lift him out of the heat and dust."

With tender hands he raised his comrade, and carried him into the shade. He was a skilled surgeon—taught by frequent experience—and with help from the women soon had the wound bandaged. In the meantime Roberval had recovered from his swoon, and was rubbing his eyes with amazement at the strange turn events had taken.

"How came you here?" exclaimed he to La Pommeraye.

"My evil genius prompted me to come to the aid of an ungrateful nobleman," replied Charles, laughingly. "But it was just as well for you that I did. However, it was a grand fight; and could I only have one like it every day in France, you would not get me to go to Canada. But I will not equivocate, Sieur," he added in a lower voice, drawing Roberval a little aside, "I came here, as no doubt did De Pontbriand, who was, I believe, in Paris yesterday, to accompany you on your way to Picardy. Why, you know best, but we cannot speak of it now."

De Roberval scowled, and then exclaimed with enthusiasm:

"You are a noble fellow! There were five against us when I fell, and now your bloody sword tells a heroic tale. But here, Etienne," and he turned to his only surviving retainer, who had stood all this time staring stupidly at La Pommeraye as if he had been a god suddenly descended from the sky, "look to the wounded, and you, Bastienne, help him. Are all my brave fellows dead? See what can be done, and then ride like the wind to the inn, five leagues ahead of us, and fetch men to bury the dead and bear the wounded home. But what is this? De Pontbriand wounded?"

Claude was still unconscious. He was borne to the inn on a rude litter of boughs, and there La Pommeraye watched and tended him till he was out of danger. But he was still too weak to be moved, and with the wretched accommodation and attendance which the inn afforded, his recovery bade fair to be slow. Seeing this, De Roberval had him removed to his castle, which was but a few leagues distant, and there Charles, who was not included in the invitation, was reluctantly obliged to leave his friend and return to St Malo alone. He would have been much more reluctant had not the tears which

Marie had shed, as he imagined, over Claude's body, convinced him still more firmly that she was the object of his affection.

And so it happened that Claude spent a large part of the winter in Picardy, watched over and waited upon, as his strength slowly returned, by the fair hands of Marguerite de Roberval and her vivacious friend and companion, Marie de Vignan.

CHAPTER VI

Winter went swiftly, and towards the spring Claude's strength came slowly back to him. The physician who waited on him, however, ordered perfect rest during the summer months; and so, when news came that Cartier had his five ships all ready for sea, stored with provisions and fully manned, he had reluctantly to consent to remain behind in France. But he was not to remain alone. De Roberval could not go to make a permanent colonisation in America without abundant firearms, artillery, and munitions of war. But the gay life of the Court had exhausted the royal treasury, and for the moment it seemed as if all his preparations had been in vain. King Francis, however, was as eager to colonise the New World as was Roberval himself, and he despatched a messenger to St Malo, commanding Cartier to start with what preparations he had made, and promising to send Roberval shortly after with three ships fully equipped with powder to store a magazine, balls to last for years, and guns sufficient and strong enough to ably protect the destined colony.

De Roberval was not in St Malo when the news arrived, but La Pommeraye was, and the chance to bear the message to Picardy himself was too good to be lost.

On reaching the castle he found, to his great disappointment, that Marguerite had been for some time in Paris, while Claude had long before returned to his own home in Rouen. De Roberval was still there, however, completing his final preparations for departure. He went into a white rage at the news of the enforced delay; but there was no help for it. So he sent Charles back to tell Cartier to start at once, and to expect him in the autumn. In the meantime he was to plant seed, build his forts, and make ready platforms for heavy pieces and a well-protected powder magazine.

It so happened that Marie was still at the castle. Marguerite had gone to an aunt in Paris, and her friend was to join her with De Roberval as soon as the latter had finally wound up his affairs and arranged for the management of his estate.

During the few days which Charles spent in Picardy he was thrown a good deal with Mdlle. de Vignan, and with an almost boyish impulse he took her into his confidence, and told her his seemingly hopeless love for Marguerite. In his enthusiasm he scarcely noticed how little encouragement she gave him, or else he interpreted her silence as a favourable sign. But when he was gone, the large-hearted and impressionable girl stood looking after him till he and his horse were a mere speck in the distance, and then she went to her own room, shut herself up, and wept bitterly.

One week later Cartier was on his way to Hochelaga, and Charles, sunk in reverie, stood by his side on the deck of *La Grande Hermine*, and, with eyes fixed on the shores they were leaving, heard not a word that Cartier uttered. The New World had lost its charms for him. His soul would know no content till he was once more back in France, or at least till he was once more within reach of Marguerite de Roberval.

Through May and June the vessels swept across the ocean, and without mishap entered the Gulf of St Lawrence, and sailed up the broad river of Hochelaga. The explorers landed at Cap Rouge, and began to clear the forest, sow turnip seed, and build forts. When the work was well under way, leaving Vicomte de Beaupré in charge at Cap Rouge, Cartier and La Pommeraye went on a voyage of exploration into the interior of the country, hoping on their return to find De Roberval at the fort.

All this time De Roberval was busy rushing up and down France; but the King was slow in opening the nation's purse, and winter came without any preparations having been made to follow Cartier. Roberval chafed under the disappointment, but was powerless to do anything.

During the summer he had formed the sudden and surprising resolution of taking his niece and ward to Canada with him. The announcement of this plan occasioned a good deal of astonishment, but Roberval would listen to no remonstrances. Special accommodation would have to be arranged for them on board his ship, and they must learn to put up with hardships, and to accustom themselves to the life of colonists. It might be years before his return

to France, and he had fully decided not to leave them behind. Whatever his purpose may really have been, he had evidently made up his mind, and was not to be turned aside from his determination. The girls themselves asked nothing better. Full of the spirit of youth and adventure, they looked forward with delight to the prospect of a share in an expedition on which the eyes and hopes of half France were centred, and eagerly they set about making their preparations for departure.

In the meantime, however, one day in the early part of November, De Roberval was surprised by a request from Claude de Pontbriand—now fully restored to health—for permission to pay his addresses to Marguerite. His rejection of the proposal was so prompt, and couched in such emphatic terms, that Claude was utterly taken aback. He was poor, and had hesitated long to declare his love, supposing that his poverty would naturally be an objection to him in Roberval's eyes; but in respect of birth and position he was fully Marguerite's equal, and now that she was about to accompany her uncle to Canada, where, in a new sphere of life, all would be placed upon a more equal footing, he had gained courage to offer himself as her suitor. But De Roberval not only refused to listen to him, but dismissed him in such haughty terms that the young man's pride rebelled, and he demanded an explanation. High words ensued, and a quarrel was only averted by Claude's diplomacy and presence of mind in recollecting that in the event of a duel his case would indeed be hopeless. But he was at a loss for an explanation of the rude reception with which his proposal had been met.

Marguerite, however, had a key to the enigma. She had heard from her old nurse how, years before, her uncle had been madly infatuated with Claude's mother, and how that noble lady had refused his hand, and had married instead the poor but handsome young Captain Maurice de Pontbriand. The bitter grudge which Roberval owed the name had seemingly come to life again at the idea of uniting one of his family with the son of his successful rival. His temper, too, was irritated by the protracted delay in getting his expedition under way, and by the many harassments with which he was forced to contend. The discovery that Claude had already won his niece's affections added fuel to the fire of his wrath, and he

forbade all further interviews or communications between the lovers.

Marguerite had so long implicitly yielded to the strong will of her uncle—whom she revered as a father, having known no other—that she never thought of attempting disobedience. She wrote to Claude, who would have persuaded her to meet him by stealth, begging him to wait, even if she had to go to America without him. For, since this quarrel with De Roberval, it would be impossible for Claude to take passage in the same ship, but he could easily follow her. In the New World all the conditions of life would be changed, and, once there, they might hope to win her uncle's consent to their union.

Claude, though ill-content with this arrangement, saw nothing for it but to bide his time. He made no further effort to see Marguerite for the present, but kept a careful watch over De Roberval's movements, that he might know to a certainty when he intended to sail.

Winter came, and still the King did nothing. De Roberval was in Paris with his household, and Claude had taken up his quarters in the same city. At length tidings came which made De Roberval's heart bound with hope once more. The King had at last roused himself; nay, he had already purchased three ships—three noble vessels—and they even now lay in the harbour of La Rochelle, ready for Roberval to equip and man. This was late in February. All through March the nobleman superintended the storing of the powder, the loading of the guns, and the procuring of the crews. This last was no easy matter. But few of the hardy French sailors would venture on the voyage, and in despair Roberval was compelled to get together his crews and colonists almost entirely from the prisons.

Early in April everything was completed; and one bright morning the three vessels stole out through the surrounding islands, caught the last glimpse of the lantern tower, and sailed away for America. Marguerite and Marie, with the faithful Bastienne, stood on the deck of De Roberval's ship, gazing back at the shores of La Belle France. A cloud seemed to hang over their departure, and it had none of the joyous excitement they had anticipated. Marguerite was torn asunder between her love for Claude and her ideas of duty to her

uncle. A message from De Pontbriand had assured her that he intended to join the expedition, and she supposed him to have managed to embark on one of the other ships; but her heart was heavy within her at the thought of her uncle's vengeance when he should find it out. She could not even be certain that he had embarked at all, and she was leaving France, perhaps for ever, without a farewell word from his lips.

Marie had her own inward perplexities. In the New World for which they were bound they would be certain to encounter La Pommeraye, and the secret she had so faithfully kept for him weighed heavily on her mind. She had several times been on the point of telling Marguerite, but for some reason or other she shrank from uttering his name. Her feelings towards him had undergone a change, which had the effect of making her shun all mention of the man whose praises had once been perpetually on her lips. She foresaw that nothing but unhappiness for herself could result from meeting him again, and yet she could not restrain a throb of the heart when his stalwart form and handsome features rose before her.

The two girls stood in silence, their eyes fixed on the fast-receding shore. Old Bastienne, beside them, was dissolved in tears. She would not have deserted her young mistress; but at her age to leave her native land and face the perils of a new and unknown country was a sore trial.

As the beloved shores faded into a blue haze on the horizon, a familiar step was heard on the deck approaching the mournful little group. Marguerite turned, with a sudden thrill at her heart, and beheld De Pontbriand.

Astonishment left her no words with which to greet him. Marie recovered herself first.

"M. de Pontbriand!" she exclaimed, "how did you get here?"

"Easily enough," replied Claude. "I simply came on board last night, and kept out of sight till this moment. Now that I am here, and we are so far from land, the Sieur de Roberval can hardly refuse me

accommodation. I suppose he will scarcely go the length of throwing me overboard."

"You do not know my uncle, Claude," said Marguerite, anxiously. "I tremble for your first meeting with him. He is not used to being thwarted. Pray Heaven you and he may not quarrel any further. He is a dangerous man, if once his will is opposed."

Almost as she spoke De Roberval appeared on deck and at once came towards them. Then followed a stormy scene. Claude begged for an interview in De Roberval's private cabin. Alone with the indignant nobleman, he tried to calm his wrath, but explanations and persuasions were alike in vain. At last, anxious on Marguerite's account, and fearing lest her uncle might suspect her of complicity in a plot to secure his presence on board, and wreak his vengeance on her as well, Claude resolved on a compromise.

"Hear me, Sieur," he said firmly, in a voice which commanded attention. "I love your niece, as you know, and I would follow her though you took her to the end of the world. But for her sake, and to prove to you that she is innocent of all connivance at my being here, I will avoid her society for the rest of the voyage. It will be enough to see her at a distance, and to know that she is safe. You need fear no further intrusion from me, at all events until the New World is reached. I give you my word."

De Roberval's rage had so completely mastered him that speech seemed to have almost deserted him. His words came thickly.

"Go, sir," he said at last, pointing to the door, "and take heed how you break your promise. If you dare to address my niece as a lover again on this voyage, you die. And when we reach the New World I will take excellent care that you are sent about your business. Remember what I say. If I hear that you have disobeyed me I will, despite your noble blood, hang you to the yard-arm, as the first example of the fate which will surely overtake the man who dares to thwart a De Roberval."

With great difficulty Claude restrained himself under this insulting language, which nothing but his anxiety for Marguerite could have

induced him to bear. He knew that De Roberval was quite capable of executing his threats; and he was sufficiently cool to reflect that if he provoked him farther Marguerite's position would be infinitely worse, while there was no hope that anything could be accomplished by force. He therefore compelled himself to bow in silence, and took his departure.

As he left the cabin, he noticed a sleek, shiftless-looking individual, with spy stamped on every line of his face, standing by the open gangway. He had a sickly-green complexion, and, as if to match its hue, he was clad in a shabby green jerkin, rough green cap, green doublet, and hose of the same colour. It was Michel Gaillon, the first criminal to die on Canadian soil. He had so far escaped the hand of the law, but was, even as he stood there, being hunted high and low for a brutal murder. He carried no rapier. Had he possessed such a weapon he would probably have feared to draw it lest he might injure himself; but as a poisoner he was without a peer in France. A crime had been brought home to him; he saw that it would cost him his neck; and he had contrived to stow himself away on board *L'Heureux*, and was now on his way to explain his presence to De Roberval, trusting to luck and his sharp wits to win his way into the good graces of that nobleman.

He had heard every word which had passed, and he saw at once that he would have a field for his diabolical machinations. Could Claude have seen the leer with which the ghastly apparition followed him as he passed, he would have shuddered with a sense of approaching danger. He did not look back, however, and the Man in Green, having requested an audience with De Roberval, was admitted to the cabin.

De Roberval's hand went to his sword as he beheld the extraordinary figure and sinister countenance of his visitor.

"Who are you, and what brings you here?" said he sternly. "You are not one of my crew."

"May it please you, most noble Sieur," said the man, bowing low, "I have come to offer my services as physician to your expedition. I am well versed in drugs, and with the knife no man in France is more

skilful. I have restored life to the Duc d'Orleans, when the Court physician gave him up; and——"

"Enough!" said De Roberval, who had not removed his keen gaze from the man's face for an instant. "Enough! I have heard of you. You are Gaillon, the poisoner!"

The man leaped back trembling as he heard his own name.

"I knew you the instant my eyes fell upon you," pursued De Roberval. "You have come on board to escape the fate which awaits you in France. If I did my duty I should order you to be thrown overboard this moment."

The wretch stood cowering.

"Most noble Sieur," he faltered, "I have fled from France to lead a new life in a new world."

"Silence, liar!" thundered De Roberval. "You have fled from France to escape death for the murder of Paul d'Auban. You see I know your character. But it has occurred to me," he went on, with a grim smile, "that I shall need an executioner in my colony before many months, and you would probably answer my purpose. Go!" he added, his brow contracting with sudden anger, "leave my sight, and look that you do not attempt any of your schemes while you are on board this vessel. As long as you do as I command you, you need fear nothing; but disobey me, and I will wind a devil's cravat round your neck, and be doing God a service by sending you from His blessed earth."

The astonished criminal slunk from the room. As he ascended the gangway he reflected to himself that in leaving his pursuers in La Rochelle he seemed to have leaped from the frying-pan into the fire. But he saw his way clearly before him. He would in the meantime obey Roberval's lightest whim; and when an opportunity presented itself he would so ingratiate himself into the good opinion of the nobleman as to be made his confidant. He had unlimited confidence in his own powers, and an ambition which knew no bounds. Fate seemed to favour him. Already he had overheard an interview which had put him in possession of some of Roberval's most

intimate affairs. He would bide his time, and wait for a chance to make use of his knowledge.

Some days passed without event. Claude kept carefully to the letter of his promise, and avoided as much as possible the society of the two girls. He shared the quarters of an old school-friend, Paul d'Auxhillon, and rarely went on deck when it was at all probable that the women would be there.

They had been steering westward over moderately calm seas for nearly a week, when, on a glorious moonlight night, the breeze stiffened, and the little vessel began to pitch on the rising waves. The cabin was close at all times, but at night Claude nearly always spent most of his time on deck. On this particular night he had no desire for sleep, and midnight found him still pacing to and fro, watching the glitter of the moonlight on the dancing waters.

Just about twelve o'clock Marguerite, oppressed by the close air between decks, and rendered dizzy by the slight pitching of the vessel, stole softly from her cabin, without disturbing Marie, and sought the open air. She had not been long on deck before she became aware of the presence of a man who was not one of the common sailors. For a moment she thought the motionless figure with its back towards her was her uncle; but a second glance told her it was De Pontbriand. She moved noiselessly towards him, as he stood gazing out on the broad moonlit expanse, his thoughts occupied with the bitter fate that held him so near his love, and yet so far apart from her, and, gently touching his shoulder, she breathed his name.

He turned: their lips met, and so great was the revulsion of feeling that for a few moments neither could speak. But they were standing where they might have been observed either by the helmsman or the man on the lookout, and Claude presently drew her to the shadow of the forecastle. Here they were sheltered from view, and could give themselves up to the rapture of being together once more. Neither noticed a dark figure crouched on the deck behind a spar not three feet away from them. It was Gaillon. He had seen Marguerite pass up the gangway, and knowing that Claude was on deck had followed, panther-like, to watch her movements. His quick

intelligence at once divined that if a meeting between the lovers had been planned, they would probably seek the shadow afforded by the forecastle; and in the few moments when their attention was wholly absorbed in each other he had noiselessly crawled across the deck, and concealed himself where he could overhear their every word.

Very little was said, but not a syllable escaped him. Marguerite, for the first time, allowed Claude to say hard things about her uncle. But even yet she tried to find excuses for him.

"O Claude," she said, "he is mad! I have watched him day by day, and would not believe it. But his violent ambition, and the thwarting to which it has been subjected, have unhinged his mind. I am hoping that the active life he must necessarily lead in Canada will restore his reason. But mad he is now, and for my sake bear with him and humour him. He has been cruel to us, unkind to me, brutal to you, but he is not the uncle I once knew and loved. Surely his old nature will return when we are settled in our new home, and he will consent to our marriage."

Claude could not help thinking that there was small ground for encouragement, but he would not damp her sweet hopefulness. They talked a little longer in a more cheerful strain, each trying to raise the spirits of the other.

"Dear," said Claude, at last, "for your sake I will be patient and wait. But you must not stay here. The watch may discover us; and your good name would become a by-word in our new colony. Say good-night to me and go."

The two held each other in a long embrace, which made up for weeks of separation.

"If ever you should want me," said Claude, "you will find me here—every night—at this hour. But do not come again unless you need me. There are men on board who would delight in making trouble for us with your uncle. The snake-like eyes of that fellow Gaillon haunt me like a nightmare."

They separated. Marguerite returned to her cabin; and Claude, with a lighter heart, resumed his pacing of the deck, all unconscious that

the eyes he had just described were watching him with a fiendish glitter which boded ill for his future.

At last he went below, and Gaillon crept out of the dark corner where he had lain crouched, afraid to stir for fear of attracting Claude's attention. As he emerged from his hiding-place, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and he found himself face to face with a young sailor from Picardy, Blaise Perron by name, an honest, kindly young fellow, who had noticed the black looks and skulking ways of the green-suited scoundrel, and had determined to keep an eye upon him.

"What are you doing here?" cried he, as he saw Gaillon crawl from behind the spar.

Gaillon replied with an oath, and an admonition to mind his own affairs, and let honest men alone.

"Honest men do not skulk in corners and watch other people's doings," replied the young fellow, who, however, had only just come on deck, and was ignorant of the scene between Claude and Marguerite. "Let me catch you plotting any villainy against the Sieur de Pontbriand, and I will throw you overboard first, and report afterwards."

Gaillon, seeing that his schemes were likely to be thwarted unless he exercised some caution, condescended to explain that he had fallen asleep in his corner, had only just awakened, and was on his way below to his berth. But as he descended the gangway he cast an evil look behind him on the young sailor at his post, and vowed that in his own time and way he would revenge himself upon him.

CHAPTER VII

Another week passed, and with the change of the moon, as the old sailors on board had prophesied, came also a change in the weather. The wind rose steadily, and before long the staunch craft was creaking and groaning as she climbed the ocean billows or slid swiftly down their steep sides. By the evening of the 24th the wind had increased to a gale. All the upper sails had been hauled down, and the lower ones doubly reefed; but still an occasional wave fell with a mighty crash on the deck, swirled along the sides, and gurgled through the lee scuppers.

At midnight Claude, true to his promise, went on deck. He had, of course, no expectation of seeing Marguerite, but he had not failed to keep his word, and be at the appointed spot each night.

The storm was raging when he reached the deck. There was no rain, but the sky was covered with flying clouds, through which the waning moon burst fitfully, only to be immediately swallowed up again. The hungry waves rolled high above the little vessel, and seemed as if they would overwhelm her; but she gallantly ploughed along, feeling her way like a thing of life across the trackless waste of waters.

A sailor passed Claude with a cheery "Good-night, Monsieur. A stormy night!"

As Claude returned his salute he recognised the young Picard, Blaise Perron, whom he knew well, and who had often performed slight services for him during his stay at De Roberval's castle. So great was the loneliness in which his life was plunged just now that he was grateful for the sound of a friendly voice, and returned the greeting with much heartiness, adding a kindly word or two as he passed.

He made his way with difficulty across the slippery deck. The cordage sang a wild song about him, the spray leaped stinging against his face, and the vessel groaned in every plank and spar.

In the shelter of the forecastle there was comparative quiet and safety. A figure wrapped in a cloak was standing in the deepest

shadow, and moved towards him as he came up. He could hardly believe his senses. It was Marguerite!

"My love!" he exclaimed, folding her tenderly in his arms, and drawing her farther back into the shelter. "That you should be here, and in such a storm!"

As he spoke, a wave struck the vessel amidships, sent the spray in a shower over them, and fell with a great thud at their feet.

"That was a narrow escape," Claude went on. "Had we been a foot nearer the stern we should have been dashed against the bulwarks, and the whole ship would have known of our meeting here. But what has brought you out, my darling? Is anything wrong? I shudder when I think of the risks you must have run in getting here in this wind."

"The storm is glorious, Claude, and a little salt water will not hurt me. I could not stay below. You will think me foolish, but I had a dream about you—such a dreadful dream that I felt as if I must come to see that you were safe. I thought I saw you in the toils of a monstrous serpent. It had wound itself about you, and seemed to be crushing you in its folds. I tried to tear it off, but it seized you the closer; and as I stood back and gazed at it in horror it seemed to take the form and features of that wretched creature in green who follows my uncle about all day like a whipped cur."

"Sweetheart," said her lover, "it was a blessed dream, since it brought you to me. It gives me new life to see you. But I do not wonder that the sight of that fellow should give you nightmare. The first time I saw him I could not help christening him the sea-serpent. His baleful eye seems to be always upon me. If I should meet him to-night I should be tempted to send him back to the ocean depths from whence he looks as if he had but lately come."

"Dear, do not joke about him. I am not superstitious, but I fear that man, and would have you be on your guard against him. It was to warn you about him that I risked coming to you to-night."

She was much agitated, and Claude soothed and comforted her, wrapping her cloak about her to shield her from the storm, and reassuring her with promises and tender words.

While this scene was taking place on deck, a very different one was going on below, in Roberval's cabin. Gaillon, who must have been so constituted that he could do without sleep, had seen Marguerite leave her cabin and ascend the gangway. He knew that Claude had gone on deck, and there was no doubt that the lovers were together. Now was his chance. He stole to De Roberval's cabin, opened the door by some means best known to himself, and, entering, touched the sleeping nobleman on the shoulder.

Roberval was on his feet in an instant, and a dagger flashed at Gaillon's throat. The man was prepared, however, and backed quickly towards the door, where the light from the passage shone full upon his face. Roberval uttered an oath when he saw who it was.

"Dog of an assassin!" exclaimed he, "what brings you here?"

"If your most noble highness will let me speak," said Gaillon, cringing obsequiously, "I have important tidings which will not keep till morning. Your niece is not in her room."

"Villain!" roared De Roberval, "be careful what you say, or, by Heaven, I will run you through!"

"Your niece, most noble Sieur, has left her cabin, and is now on deck with her lover. They are in the habit of meeting thus at night. I would have warned you before, but dreaded to call down your anger on my own head. Even now I would have kept silence, but the honour of your house hangs in the balance."

Roberval appeared scarcely to hear the latter part of this speech. He had turned his back on Gaillon, and was rapidly donning some clothes. In two minutes he was fully dressed, and, turning hastily round, exclaimed: "Who is the lookout to-night?"

"Blaise Perron, the Picard, Sieur. He has seen them together beyond a doubt, and is now keeping watch for them against intruders."

This was a lie, but Gaillon did not stick at trifles.

"Get rid of him for me," said Roberval shortly. "I care not how."

Gaillon chuckled to himself as he followed his master up the gangway. His schemes were turning out successful beyond his wildest hopes.

"Let us steal along to windward, Sieur," he whispered. "They are on the lee side of the forecastle, and doubtless we shall come upon them in one another's arms."

The noise of the wind and waves drowned their footsteps, and they were able to approach unnoticed till they were within a few feet of the lovers. Claude had just succeeded in persuading Marguerite to go below and try to sleep. He had taken her in his arms at parting, and she clung to him with an earnestness born of her forebodings. It was thus that Roberval surprised them.

The first intimation they had of his presence was an oath which sounded suddenly out of the darkness. Claude leaped back and drew his rapier. De Roberval stood before him with drawn sword. Unable to stand by and witness a combat between her uncle and her lover, Marguerite threw herself between them.

"Consider, I beg of you, Monsieur," said Claude, hurriedly; "your niece's honour is at stake. If we attract the attention of the watch the fair name of a De Roberval will be for ever sullied."

Roberval lowered his weapon.

"You say truly," he remarked grimly, "though the suggestion comes a trifle late, methinks. I should dishonour my sword to draw it on a liar and a coward. Handcuffs and the hold will be a more fitting fate for such as you."

At these words even Claude's endurance gave way, and disregarding Marguerite's entreaties, he threw himself upon De Roberval. The scuffle attracted the watch, and several of the sailors came running up. In the darkness and confusion it was impossible to distinguish anything clearly, but Claude was soon overpowered, and

De Roberval's voice made itself heard above the roar of the elements, calling for manacles. Gaillon appeared with them as if by magic; and before the crew had time to realise anything but the fact that their commander had been assaulted, Claude's wrists were chained together, and he was powerless. As Gaillon finished adjusting the handcuffs, the young Picard before mentioned, who was the only other person to grasp the situation, threw himself upon the spy, and clutched his throat. Almost as his fingers closed they relaxed their grip again, and he fell headlong on the deck. A few moments he writhed in agony, and when he was raised it was found that he was quite dead, though no mark of violence could be found upon him.

"It is a judgment of Heaven," said Gaillon, devoutly crossing himself.

"A judgment of Hell, rather, from whence you came," muttered De Roberval. "But you have done your work well. Heave the carrion overboard," added he, giving the young sailor's body a contemptuous kick. "And now to the hold with that villain. And you," turning, to his niece, "to your cabin with you. I shall have more to say to you to-morrow."

The whole scene had passed so quickly that before the bewildered girl had time to realise what had happened, she saw her lover being marched below in chains. She would have rushed after him, but her uncle's strong hand restrained her, and she was forced to watch him disappear without being able even to bid him farewell.

After this the days and weeks passed by, and Claude remained in his prison, with no companions save the rats which swarmed about him. His feet were fortunately free, or he might have been devoured. Already his body held the marks of their sharp and hungry teeth, where they had attacked him while he slept. He grew thin and pale from the close confinement and the wretched food which was brought to him three times a day by the hands of the villain Gaillon. His heart was bitter within him, and he had almost abandoned hope. But for the knowledge that the voyage must come to an end, and that some change must then take place in his circumstances, he would have given way to despair.

He was missed from the deck by those of the rough colonists who knew him by sight; but a rumour had gone about among the crew that he had insulted De Roberval's niece, and no one ventured to express pity for his fate. The few men of gentle blood on board knew, or suspected, the true version of the story, but regard for Marguerite's good name compelled them to keep silence.

While Claude was pining in his prison Marguerite's heart was growing hard within her. She could no longer bring herself to respect her uncle. She shed no tears, nor would she listen to words of sympathy from her friend Marie, or the old *bonne*; but her face grew pale and set, and a resolute expression formed itself about her mouth.

The sailors revered her as a saint; and when she appeared on deck the roughest man took off his cap as she passed, and hushed the profanity on his lips. Suspicions of the true state of the case were abroad, but no one dared to show sympathy with the prisoner. The men stood in great awe of De Roberval, and still more of the terrible Gaillon, who was daily advancing in favour with his master, whose devoted attendant he had now become.

Matters were still in this state, and De Roberval showed no signs of relenting, when, early in the month of June, the rugged shores of Newfoundland loomed up before the grateful eyes of the crew. It was not their destination, but at least it was land; and although there were still dangers to be passed, in those days it was the broad stretch of the ocean which tried the seamen's nerves. They hailed with joy the first glimpse of the New World after the terrible tedium of the voyage.

The three vessels soon swept through the narrow entrance, and the sailors were delighted to see before them seventeen fishing-boats riding safely in the harbour. De Roberval cast anchor, intending to stock his vessels with fish, and procure fresh water. But he had scarcely finished his preparations when a report ran through the ships that three other vessels were entering the harbour. He knew that the Spaniards had eyed with jealousy the expedition when it was being fitted out, and believed that the attack of Pamphilo de Narvaez upon him and his party had been intended to put an end to

the venture. Thinking, therefore, that it might be an enemy who was approaching, he was about to order his men to their guns, when the leading vessel unfurled the broad white flag strewn with the *fleur-de-lis* of France. His men, at the welcome sight, sent up a wild shout of joy which sounded through the harbour, and was re-echoed from the fleet of fishermen. Whose could the ships be? Had King Francis repented of his generosity, and sent a fleet to recall him? That could hardly be. One vessel would have been sufficient for that purpose. While he debated in his mind the probable destination of the fleet, the leading vessel swung round, her sails dropped, and as the anchor rattled down into the dark waters De Roberval recognised *La Grande Hermine*. Cartier deserting his post? What could be the meaning of this?

While the attention of every one on board the vessel was thus diverted, and not a soul was left below to observe her actions, Marguerite resolved to put into execution a plan she had long ago formed. She had discovered a loose board in the flooring of her cabin, and with the aid of Bastienne and Marie she now succeeded in removing it. Their united efforts disclosed a hole large enough for her to pass through. A huge rat rushed out as the plank was removed, causing the other two women to shriek aloud. Marguerite shuddered as she looked into the black depths below, and thought of the horrors Claude must have endured all these weeks. Unhesitatingly she lowered herself down on the rough barrels, boxes, and bags, and began feeling her way in the darkness, calling softly on her lover's name. For some time there was no response, but as she reached a cleared space, the light from an opening in the deck above revealed Claude pacing restlessly to and fro in his narrow prison, his ears strained to catch the meaning of the sounds from above. She was by his side in an instant.

"Marguerite!"

He uttered but the one word, and stood gazing at her, but without touching her. Coming suddenly upon him out of the darkness he took her for a vision. But her arms were about his neck, and the warm pressure of her cheek against his convinced him of the reality of her presence. He could not take her in his manacled arms; but she

kissed the fettered wrists, and wept to see the terrible difference the six weeks had wrought in his once stalwart form. The strong young soldier himself, to whom the sudden shock of joy had come so unexpectedly after his long and dreary solitude, could not keep back the tears. Their words were few and broken. Marguerite told him how she had found a way to reach him, and how the other two women were keeping guard above till her return; and he showed her the narrow space where he had walked up and down in the twilight all these weary days, and the hard pallet where he had slept. Her tears flowed afresh at the sight. But the increasing noise on the deck above, the sounds of heavy feet and of men shouting, recalled them to the present.

"Where are we, dearest?" said Claude. "We cannot have reached Charlesbourg Royal?"

"No, would to Heaven that we had! It is Newfoundland, and my uncle has anchored to procure fresh water. O Claude, I shudder to think what will become of us. My uncle is surely mad. His temper has become so ungovernable that scarce a man on board dares to address him. I have thought sometimes that that wretch Gaillon, who is constantly in attendance upon him, must be keeping him under the influence of some drug or charm which is surely sapping his intelligence. I tremble when he approaches, for I know not what fresh insult he may heap upon me."

Claude ground his teeth.

"If I were but free, and had the use of my hands for five minutes!" he muttered. "Why did I submit to him for so long? But hark! there is surely something of unusual importance going on overhead."

By this time a boat had put off from *La Grande Hermine*, and Cartier was seen to enter it. Roberval stood on the poop, watching his approach in silence. Just at this moment some one touched his arm. It was Gaillon.

"Pardon, Sieur," he murmured in the nobleman's ear, "but some one has obtained access to the prisoner in the hold. I fear lest he may be planning an escape."

Roberval swore a fearful oath.

"Here, Bruneau, Gachet!" he exclaimed to two of the roughest and most villainous-looking of the crew, "down into the hold with you, and fetch me hither the prisoner and whoever it is who is with him. They will look well from yonder yard-arm."

He followed the men down the gangway, and stood waiting between decks while they descended into Claude's prison. Before the lovers could separate, one of the ruffians had rudely seized Marguerite by the shoulder. Claude raised his manacled arms and dealt him a blow which sent him staggering, but was himself instantly overpowered and pinioned by the other man, Gachet. Bruneau, recovering himself, and stinging from the blow he had received, turned upon Marguerite, and grasping her arm roughly, shouted: "Up with you to the deck, you hussy!"

Roberval heard the words, and it dawned upon him for the first time that it was his niece who was below. He sprang forward in time to see her, white as death, shake the man off, and ascend the ladder alone. Beside himself with rage as he was, he could not forget that she was a woman, and a De Roberval. Giving orders that Claude should be kept in his prison, with frigid politeness he took her hand and conducted her to her cabin, where Marie and the old nurse, half frantic with fear at the sounds which reached them, were still watching beside the open space in the floor.

"So, Madame," said Roberval between his set teeth, and with a steely glitter in his eyes, "so this is the ingenious means by which you contrived to visit your paramour. We shall find a way to make both of you dearly repent your stolen interviews."

He was gone before either of the women could utter a word, and they heard his stern and imperious voice addressing the man who had so rudely assaulted his niece.

"You, Pierre Bruneau, villain and cut-throat dog, shall learn what it is to insult a De Roberval. To the yard-arm with him!" exclaimed he to the men who had gathered about the gangway. "Cartier shall see what sort of discipline we keep."

No one dared to disobey. Bruneau was hurried on deck, the noose was cast about his neck, and as Cartier drew near the vessel his astonished eyes were greeted by the sight of the struggling form of the burly villain as he swung aloft.

As Cartier came on board his first words were:

"The Sieur De Roberval gives me a ghastly welcome."

"Such a welcome," returned De Roberval, "as awaits all who disobey my orders or insult my name. Why have you left Charlesbourg Royal?"

"Before I answer that question, Monsieur, I must know whether your last remark has reference to my having left my post without your orders?"

"What you will," said De Roberval, haughtily.

"Then, Sieur, I reserve the right to refuse an answer. I am my own master on the high seas; and Jacques Cartier will brook insult from no man."

His hand sought his sword as he spoke, and De Roberval's weapon flashed from its sheath.

A quarrel was imminent; but Roberval's rage seemed to subside as suddenly as it had arisen.

"Put up your sword," he said sternly. "We are the leaders, and the death of one or both of us would mean ruin to the enterprise."

"So far as I am concerned, Sieur, it is ended already. I serve under no man, least of all under one who uses such terms as you have just applied to me. I am not hasty to quarrel, but, being in, I will come out honourably, or die."

"Admirably said," replied De Roberval, "and Canada needs just such a man as yourself. I was hasty in my speech; but I had no thought that you had disobeyed orders. I merely supposed you to have left Canada because my long delay had forced you to conclude that I had given up the enterprise. You were too quick to

misinterpret me. But why have you left Charlesbourg?" enquired he, as Cartier somewhat reluctantly sheathed his sword.

"Because, Sieur, we could do no more there. The natives were unfriendly, and our ammunition was well-nigh exhausted. Our men were openly mutinous; and I could do naught with the cut-throats from the prisons, half of whom deserted, and have been adopted by wandering bands of Indians."

Whatever De Roberval may have felt on hearing this news, he gave no sign.

"Be not disheartened," he said. "I have arms in plenty, and ammunition enough to conquer all the savages on the continent. Return to your vessels, and get ready to sail back with us on the morrow. All will yet be well."

But Cartier had formed a quick resolve. He would not go back. He saw the wretched crew of criminals who lined the deck about him, and he knew that Roberval's enterprise must end in failure. He determined to gain time.

"Be it so, Sieur," he replied. "To-morrow we will be ready for the return voyage. But where is our old friend, De Pontbriand? Have you not brought him with you?"

"He is on board," replied De Roberval, in an unmoved voice, "but he has been ill, and in a high fever. Perfect quiet is ordered for him. I should be disobeying the physician's orders did I allow you to see him."

Something in the metallic ring of his voice gave Cartier a cold shiver of dread, a menace of impending evil. It would have been useless to enquire further, however, and he returned to his ship to consult with La Pommeraye, his second in command, and with his other officers.

CHAPTER VIII

La Pommeraye had been left in charge of *La Grande Hermine* while Cartier paid his visit to Roberval's ship. He anxiously awaited the news which Cartier brought, and his first enquiries naturally were for his friend, De Pontbriand.

"Ill, and in danger?" he exclaimed, when Cartier had repeated to him De Roberval's words. "I must go to him at once."

"Have I not just told you," said Cartier, "that no one can see him? De Roberval refused me that privilege, and think you that he will grant you permission? It is at the command of the leech, and doubtless there is need for his care. But we are ordered to return to Canada," added he, sharply.

"Never!" exclaimed Charles with energy. "The last year has taught us a lesson. No success can attend the efforts of France to plant a colony on the rugged shores of the Hochelaga."

"I fear me," said Cartier, "that there will be trouble if we refuse to go back. De Roberval would not hesitate to attempt force; and our men are so disheartened and weary after the hardships they have endured, that they will resist to the death any effort to compel them to return."

"Would it not be possible to return for a short time, and leave Charlesbourg before winter sets in? Another winter I will not spend in Canada—especially not with the scoundrels we have brought with us. And, if I mistake not, we shall have henceforth to contend with the Indians, who will now be aided by our wretched deserters."

"Were we once more on shore," returned Cartier, "it would be very hard to get away again. Roberval is a determined man, and he has full two hundred armed men on his ships. We should be outnumbered, and easily overpowered. If the colonists he has brought were of a better class than our own, there might be some hope of ultimate success; but the wretched crew who line his decks are of the lowest type. See, one of them swings from yonder yard even now! I fear the gallows we erected as a warning to our fellows

will bear goodly and abundant fruit as soon as he becomes established in Canada. No, Charles, we must give him the slip under cover of darkness, and make away for France. I would not desert him if there were any chance of success; but with his following of lawless outcasts, even if he should succeed in forming a colony, it would be but a plague spot on the earth."

"But," interrupted La Pommeraye, "have you forgotten that De Pontbriand is lying ill on board that vessel? I cannot be so base as to desert my friend."

"I have thought of that also. But what good can you do by remaining? There is a physician on board, and priests, I believe. If he were to die you could do nothing by your presence; but he is young and strong, and will doubtless recover. I have a plan in my mind, besides, to save our friends and the honour of France. King Francis trusts me. He ventured on this enterprise to fill the depleted treasury of France, and to spread the blessed kingdom of Christ. I will convince him that the efforts to establish a colony on the Hochelaga will only be a drain on his resources, and that he might as well try to keep a Malouin from going to sea as attempt to lead the red man into the kingdom of Heaven. Père Grand and Père Boisseau will bear me out in what I say; and I will then ask for a ship to go to the New World and compel Roberval and his colonists to return, if they have not in the meantime ended the existence of the colony by cutting each others' throats. There will be no other way of getting Claude back again; and, once in France, we can put all our energies into more profitable voyages to the Indies; or you may find an outlet for your ardour in using your sword against England and Spain. Francis will not long be able to keep out of war."

"But to desert one's friend, and that friend ill and helpless! I cannot do it," said La Pommeraye.

"It is no desertion. You can do no good by going on board *L'Heureux*, and you may do much harm. In the present mood of De Roberval I fear the only way to prevent unnecessary bloodshed is to depart before he knows of our intention. Once safely in France, it will not be long before we are back in Canada to put an end to this foolish

scheme of colonisation. To get permission to return, and a vessel to return in, I shall need your assistance."

"You are right, I suppose; but it goes hard with me to turn my back on Claude. And how shall I ever break the news of his illness to Mdlle. de Vignan?"

"Mdlle. de Vignan? I thought it was the black-eyed niece of that mad tyrant yonder."

"So did I, at first; but had you seen as much as I have, you would think otherwise. But that reminds me—I thought I saw women on board De Roberval's vessel when we hove to."

"Your eyes deceived you not. There was a sprinkling of them on the deck—miserable creatures, fitting mates for the hang-dogs who are to be the backbone of New France. There are some of them on all the vessels; they, too, have been recruited from the prisons. What a breed of sinners will spring up at Charlesbourg Royal if we allow this colony to take root!"

"Remember, then, I go on the understanding that we return as soon as we can get the King to recall the expedition. I shall not know a happy moment till I grasp Claude's hand once more."

If the truth must be owned, the prospect of seeing Marguerite so soon, and without the vigilant supervision of her uncle, considerably influenced La Pommeraye in consenting to the departure. Still he was loyal to his friend; and could any means have been devised of rescuing Claude from the fate that awaited him in the new colony, he would not have gone without making the attempt. But if their plan was to succeed, it must be put into effect immediately. A day's delay might be fatal.

Cartier sent for the captains of the other ships to come on board *La Grande Hermine*. On their arrival he pointed to the body which still swung from the yards of De Roberval's vessel, and told them what they might expect if they were to return.

They had had enough of Canada, and eagerly concurred in Cartier's plan of flight. They returned to their vessels, to make preparations to start at once on a signal from their leader.

Night dropped down upon the harbour; and in the calm June evening the sailors, jubilant at reaching a haven after the dangers of the broad Atlantic, began to sing some of the chansons of their Old World home. The fishermen in the boats caught up the song, and a glad chorus swelled out upon the still waters; but on Cartier's vessels there was silence. The crews had learned that Roberval had commanded their return, and they also knew that Cartier had no intention of obeying. Indeed, had he attempted to do so, so disgusted had they become with the dreary and toilsome life at Charlesbourg Royal, that they would undoubtedly have mutinied. Their determined faces peered through the gathering darkness. None went to rest that night. They knew that if a breeze sprang up Cartier meant to take advantage of it, and steal out of the harbour.

One singer after another grew weary, and towards midnight only a few intermittent notes broke the stillness. Soon all was silent as the grave, save for the occasional cry of some animal prowling in search of food upon the shore.

About one in the morning a gentle breeze swept across the water from the land. A silent signal passed between Cartier's vessels, and instantly dark forms moved hither and thither about their decks. No sound was heard, but preparations were being made to sail immediately. It was impossible to raise the anchors without alarming De Roberval; so the cables were quietly slipped, the sails were as quietly hoisted, and the three vessels swung round simultaneously, swept within a hundred yards of De Roberval's ship, and bore away for the harbour mouth. The lookout saw them, but, half asleep and deeming them part of the fishing fleet, said not a word.

In the meantime Marguerite, worn out with all she had undergone during the day, had fallen into an uneasy sleep, broken by troubled dreams. After the scene with her uncle, which had ended in the hanging of the ill-fated Bruneau, she had sent for her confessor, the good Père Lebeau, the only priest on board *L'Heureux*. This good

man, by using his influence with De Roberval, had gained admission to Claude's prison, and had repeatedly visited him, administering comfort and consolation, and encouraging him to wait with hope and patience for the end of the voyage. It so happened that he had left the ship in one of the boats which had put off to procure fresh water; and so was not present during the stormy scene in the hold, or the interview between Cartier and Roberval which followed. On his return, however, he received from the lips of Marguerite a full account of all that had taken place. He remained with her some time, consoling and reassuring her, and left her somewhat comforted by his promises to see De Roberval, and endeavour once more to convince him of the mistaken course he was pursuing.

After dark, Marguerite, with Mdlle. De Vignan and old Bastienne, stole on deck for a breath of fresh air, and to gaze with wistful eyes on Cartier's ships. The body of Bruneau still swung from the yards, a ghastly vision in the dim twilight. They shuddered as they saw it.

"But courage, Marguerite," whispered Marie. "Cartier is close at hand, and he and La Pommeraye will surely be able to influence your uncle. I feel certain that to-morrow will bring us better things."

"I hope so," said Marguerite sadly. "It is indeed time. If Charles de la Pommeraye learns the fate of his friend, he will not rest until he has freed Claude, I am certain. But my uncle will brook no opposition; and I fear there will be more blood shed before anything can be accomplished."

She sighed as she spoke; and after a little the three women returned to their narrow, cramped quarters below, where Marie, clasping her friend in her arms, tried to comfort her with hopes of what the morrow held in store. Just as they fell asleep, cheered a little in their loneliness by this gleam of hope, *La Grande Hermine* stole silently past in the darkness outside, and bore away for France.

When De Roberval came on deck the next morning he swept his eye about the harbour, but looked in vain for Cartier's ships.

"Send the lookouts of last night to me at once," shouted he to his sailing-master, Jehan Alfonse. "What watch did you take?" sternly enquired he of a young Malouin who stood trembling before him.

"From eight to twelve, Sieur."

"And saw you the vessels leaving the harbour?"

"No, Sieur; no vessel passed us while I was at my post."

"And I, Sieur," said a tanned old sailor who had explored every part of the then known world, "went on at four this morning, but not a mouse stirred after that time; and indeed they could not have escaped without my knowledge, for it has been broad day since that hour."

"I fear, Sieur," timidly said a young Picard from Roberval's estate, who had stood silent in the background, "that I am to blame for not alarming the ship, if blame there be on any one. I had scarce gone on my watch when the three vessels swept by us. So noiselessly did they go that I deemed them some sleepy fishermen on their way to the banks."

"*Sacré Dieu!*" shouted Roberval; "you have ruined us all! Did I give you the fate you deserve, I would hang you as high as I did Bruneau yesterday! Take him below," exclaimed he to the men who stood by, "and keep him in irons for the rest of the voyage."

"Be not too hard upon the young man, Sieur," interposed Jehan Alfonse, stepping forward; "he is a faithful sailor, and a true; and we have too few reliable men on board to turn those against us on whom we can depend."

"Silence!" roared De Roberval, now in a towering passion. "Have I asked for your advice? I know on what I can depend—my own will and yonder rope. Have a care lest you find your own head in it."

"Sieur," rejoined the sailing-master, with firmness, "you may insult me—you may hang me if you will—but I must speak. I warn you that if you pursue your present course the expedition will be ruined before we reach Charlesbourg Royal, if it is not already ruined. Your

hasty words to Jacques Cartier yesterday have lost us the best seaman in the world, for he has doubtless set sail for France."

"You will find, at least," exclaimed De Roberval, who was by this time in a white heat, "that I am commander in my own ship. Leave the vessel at once. Board the *François*, and take with you this villain whose carelessness has ruined our fortunes. And stay. I will be generous. You are possessed by a mad idea that by going north you will find a way to China and the Indies. Go, then, and when you have finished your fool's errand return to Charlesbourg Royal, and prepare to obey my commands."

Jehan Alfonse's heart leaped with delight. He cared not for insults now; he was free, in command of a ship, and could follow out the cherished scheme of his life! He would find what Columbus had failed to discover—the long-sought north-west passage. This great polar current which swept down from the north must come from somewhere. He would follow the coast of Labrador. This mighty continent could not go on for ever; there must be a way round it, and his name would be handed down as its discoverer. He was not long in leaving *L'Heureux*, and before the day closed was out of sight on his northward journey.

De Roberval had a sinister motive in sending him away. He had spent a sleepless night. The evening before Père Lebeau had had a long interview with him, and had pleaded the cause of Marguerite and her lover, assuring De Roberval of their innocence, and begging him to persist no longer in his cruel imprisonment of Claude. But De Roberval's insensate rage was only increased. He refused to listen to arguments, and ordered the priest from his presence. The good father, seeing that his efforts were only making the situation worse, was obliged to desist from his entreaties, and left the cabin with a heavy heart. During the whole night De Roberval lay awake, brooding over some means of avenging his insulted authority; and by morning he had decided that De Pontbriand should be made an example to the crew. The form of Bruneau kept swinging back and forth before his disordered mental vision, and as he gazed upon it he resolved that De Pontbriand's should take its place. At first, as the diabolical thought took shape, he recoiled from it. Hang a gentleman

of France! But a madness seized him, and crushing down his better impulses he decided to put his resolve into execution, and teach all on board that the same fate awaited every man—be he noble or peasant—who disobeyed his will.

But he feared Jehan Alfonse. He knew the staunch and courageous sailing-master would oppose his action; and he determined to get rid of him. He smiled a grim smile as he saw his vessel fleetly winging her way out to the Atlantic. He dreaded Cartier, too; and had made up his mind to delay the execution until he had sent him on his way towards Charlesbourg Royal. Now, however, he could proceed with his scheme; both the obstacles had been removed, and nothing need prevent his carrying out his plan at once. But he feared lest Paul d'Auxhillon, and the one or two friends of Claude who had accompanied him, might oppose his design; and, accordingly, he consulted with Gaillon before putting it into execution.

That villain was delighted with the turn things were taking.

"You are acting wisely, noble Sieur," he said. "I have long felt that De Pontbriand there in the hold was the gravest menace to the success of our colony. Already I have discovered several plots for his release, and I have long known that only his death could bring us safety. But do not proceed with his execution till the morrow. To-night I will sound the faithful, and have them ready to strike down any one offering the least resistance. Would it not be well to have all on board witness this meting-out of justice?"

"All," exclaimed De Roberval. "Every soul, including his paramour. Leave me now, and have everything in readiness by the morning."

When the first grey of dawn was beginning to chase away the mists of the night the bell on *L'Heureux* began to toll out across the water. Its warning notes sent a thrill of expectancy through the ship. The majority of those on board knew the meaning of that solemn knell; and the rest, when, after the accustomed eight strokes which marked the end of the watch, the bell continued its measured clanging, were filled with a vague alarm of they knew not what. The fishermen in the harbour were roused by the sound, and the crews of the boats lined their rigging, prepared, after the ghastly spectacle which had

greeted them on the arrival of *L'Heureux*, to behold some new example of De Roberval's discipline.

Soon every soul on board the vessel stood on the deck, with the exception of the three women, and De Roberval, noting their absence, went below himself, and roughly ordered them to dress and come above at once.

When all were assembled, De Roberval addressed them. His face was pale and set, and his eye glittered with a cold and cruel resolve.

"You have come," said he, "to see a crime receive its just punishment, and though shame has come upon my own kindred, my hand shall not relax. Bring the prisoner on deck."

As Gaillon and two of the crew departed to fetch Claude, Père Lebeau, who had witnessed with horror the development of events, hastened to Roberval's side, and with his hand on his arm besought him to consider.

"Your niece is guiltless, Monsieur," he cried. "Will you bring dishonour on your name, and murder an innocent man without a trial?"

De Roberval shook him angrily off, and bade him interfere no further, or he should share Claude's fate.

"I care not for myself," said the intrepid priest. "I cannot stand by and witness a murder in cold blood. Is there no brave man in all this throng who will help me to resist this tyrant?"

Paul d'Auxhillon, and the one or two other gentlemen on board, who now for the first time realised what was about to happen, sprang forward with drawn swords, and were joined by a couple of Roberval's Picard retainers. For a moment it looked as if Claude's fate might be averted.

But Gaillon had done his work well. At a signal from De Roberval, the men who were drawn up on both sides of the deck rushed forward; the half-dozen volunteers were quickly overpowered, and after a short struggle were pinioned and rendered helpless.

Just at this moment Gaillon appeared with the prisoner. The sight of his pale face and unkempt hair, his worn, almost emaciated limbs, and bruised and swollen wrists, awakened a murmur of sympathy even among the lawless wretches who composed the crew.

Marguerite, who had stood like one in a dream while these events were taking place, realised for the first time, at the sight of her lover, what Roberval's intentions were. Her proud spirit, which had so nobly sustained her throughout the voyage, gave way at last, and she threw herself at her uncle's feet, beseeching him to have mercy.

Roberval vouchsafed her no answer, but, raising her with an iron grip, he bore her half-swooning to where Marie and Bastienne were cowering together at the side of the vessel.

"Do your duty," said he to Gaillon; "and if any man raises a word of protest he shall swing from the other end of the yard."

Gaillon needed no second bidding. The noose was swiftly thrown over Claude's neck; the rope was drawn tight, and the priest, on whom no man had ventured to lay a hand, stood holding the crucifix before his eyes, and murmuring the last offices of the Church. Just as the young man was about to be swung aloft, he turned with unflinching calmness to De Roberval, and with firm, unwavering tones said:

"The son of Louise d'Artignan curses you with his dying breath! May you perish miserably by your own murderous hand!"

De Roberval's whole expression changed on the instant from cold impassiveness to wild fury. He made one step forward as if he himself would have ended Claude's life with a blow, then paused—and held up his hand.

"Stay, Gaillon," he thundered. "Take the dog down! Send him back to his kennel! Your mother's cursed eyes have saved you!" he hissed at Claude. "I shall find another way to make you suffer."

He turned on his heel, and those nearest him heard him mutter "Louise d'Artignan!" under his breath. As the words left his lips he fell headlong on the deck, foaming at the mouth.

Gaillon sent his prisoner below, drew a phial from his pocket, and forced a few drops between the nobleman's tightly clenched teeth. Then he carried him to his berth, and remained by his side, watching and tending him alone; while on deck every man drew his breath more freely, and whispered words of astonishment passed from lip to lip.

CHAPTER IX

All that day and the following night *L'Heureux* and her consorts lay at anchor. Towards afternoon Roberval recovered sufficiently to issue commands, which Gaillon transmitted to the crew. So subdued were the men by the strange scenes they had witnessed, and so much in awe did they stand of Roberval and the terrible Gaillon, that there was none of the disorder which might naturally have been expected. Jehan Alfonse's place had been filled by an experienced and resolute seaman named Jacques Herbert, in whom Roberval had perfect confidence. Under his direction the men returned to their occupations; the prisoners of the morning were released; and soon no trace was visible of the extraordinary events which had taken place. Claude remained in the hold, and Marguerite was too ill to leave her cabin.

The next morning, when Roberval came on deck, a strong southerly wind was sweeping across the harbour. Herbert was at once ordered to get the vessel ready for sea. Crew and sailing-master were alike eager to leave the place which had been the scene of so many horrors, and willing hands soon had the sails unfurled, the anchor on the cat-head and the helm hard down, as the vessel swung round and sped away for the broad Atlantic.

"To the north," said De Roberval, as Herbert came to him to learn which direction he should take. "It is the shorter course, if the more dangerous. We will follow in the tracks of Jehan Alfonse. And I may want to touch at the barren lands of Labrador. Gold is ever found in regions of barrenness, and gold is needed for our colony."

Herbert was a rugged sailor, who thought more of a bit of salt beef and a bottle of brandy than of ingots of gold. Gold, to him, was only good for the spending; and what use it would be in the New World, where there was nothing to buy that could not be had for a few glass beads and a leaden trinket or two, was more than his intellect could conceive. He shrugged his shoulders at the nobleman's whim, as he deemed it, but answered a cheerful "Ay, ay, Monsieur." And as the vessels stood out past the headland, and on towards the white

stretch of rolling waters, his trumpet voice rang out: "Starboard your helm! 'Tend to the sheets!"

In a moment the gallant craft was sweeping on her northward way, with her sails swelling before the following breeze, riding over the summits of the chasing waves. All night she sailed, and all through the following day, and still the rugged shores of Newfoundland stood on their left. On the third day a small, misty cloud appeared on the horizon ahead. At first, the seamen thought it was another ship, but one, more keen-sighted than the others, declared it was an island.

"An island?" said a hardy fisherman who had made many voyages to the New World for fish since Columbus discovered it, "then it must be the 'Isle of Demons.' I have been on the lookout for it. The air has for some hours been hot and stifling."

"Nonsense, Laurent! It is your imagination."

"Steer away from it," insisted the sailor. "Let us hug the main shore. I know the spot; no vessel ever sails near it. Several did in early times, but the demons pounced upon them, shattered their crafts on the rocks, and carried off the crews to their haunts."

Others had heard of it too, and a thrill of superstitious awe spread among the crew. As the distant land drew nearer, lips ever polluted with profanity, hearts black with crime, called on the saints to save and protect them; and even the sceptical Herbert, as he gazed on the dark rock crowned with curling mists, fancied with the rest that he could see weird, awful shapes hovering about the shore. The horror of the place seized him. He rushed to the helm, pressed it hard down, and endeavoured to give the dreaded island as wide a berth as possible.

At this moment Roberval appeared on the scene to enquire into the cause of the disturbance.

"What means this?" exclaimed he to Herbert.

"The Isle of Demons," muttered the now thoroughly alarmed sailor. "Can you not hear their fierce voices clamouring after us?"

"The Isle of Demons! What care I for all the demons in hell? Back to your course at once; we have lost too much time already."

"But, Monsieur," said the old fisherman who had first spoken, "they have been known to utterly destroy vessels and men e'er this. Guillaume de Noué dared to defy them, and attempted to sail close to the island, but e'er his ship could reach an anchorage, she sank without a warning, bearing the entire crew down with her, excepting Guillaume, who was borne aloft by the demons, and carried to their inland abodes."

"And who," replied De Roberval, sarcastically, "can vouch for the tale, seeing all the crew perished, and the brave captain was transported to the lower world? You will have to invent some better story, good Laurent."

"Pardon, Monsieur, but I can answer for its truth. I was with Guillaume, sailing the *Belle Marie*. We were following hard after him when his vessel went down like lead, and I saw with mine own eyes good Master Guillaume borne aloft by the devils. There was no mistaking him; his red hose and scarlet hat were the only ones on board his ship. I would have attempted to rescue him, but my crew, who also witnessed the sight, fell upon me, seized the helm, and rested nor day nor night till we were safely in the harbour of St Malo, and not a man of them could ever again be persuaded to enter a craft bound for the New World."

"Pish!" said Roberval, scornfully. "Port your helm, Herbert, and steer for that island. I am master on this expedition, and if there be any demons on the land they must pay homage to me. But methinks we shall find neither the red hose of your friend, nor the abode of any demons, but a few redskins who have been blown ashore here from Newfoundland, and dare not return."

"But, Sieur——" began the trembling Herbert.

"But not me," said De Roberval. "Port your helm, or I run you through!" and he threateningly drew his rapier. In an instant the course of the vessel was changed, and, to the consternation of the sailors, bore down upon the haunted island. The black waters grew

blacker as they drew near, and each moment they expected to find their ship sinking beneath them. The lead was thrown, but no anchorage could be found; and it was not till they were within a couple of hundred yards of the shore that the welcome sound of the rattling chain and dropping anchor was heard.

The land was indeed uninviting. Barren, sterile, brown as an autumn field; grey cliffs rose on all sides, the tops of which could not be discerned, for a heavy fog hung upon them and revealed only the dark base. Gulls and terns flew screaming overhead, and swooped about the strange vessel which had dared invade the sacred precincts of their island. The great waves, rolling in on the iron-bound shore, kept up a continuous artillery, as the mighty boulders ground along the stony beach. Dull, hollow groans issued from the many caves which time had worn in the cliffs; and the hissing of the waters, the booming of the rocks, the perpetual bellow of the waves on the shore, and the wild shrieks of the birds, all made it seem to the terrified seamen that they had indeed reached the abode of the Prince of Evil.

But two men were in no way affected by the scene or the uproar—Michel Gaillon and De Roberval. The latter had formed a sudden determination. His niece and her companions must be punished. Kill them with his own hand he could not, and to put them out of the way, without making a public example of them, would be revenge without purpose; for the man, despite his mad barbarity, was convinced that he was working for great and noble ends. Now a glorious opportunity was given him to teach a salutary lesson. He would land the women on this desolate spot, giving them provisions for a year, and before that time he could return for them and bring them to his colony. This would surely establish his authority, and be a warning to all wrong-doers for the future.

He turned to Gaillon, who stood near him, smiling at the terrors of the crew.

"Get the boat ready, and order the women to prepare to land. I am going to give them a holiday on the island."

This was a project after Gaillon's own heart. He rubbed his hands with fiendish delight, and set about giving the necessary orders. A boat was soon lowered, and filled with provisions, clothing, and ammunition in plenty. Gaillon and two or three of the desperadoes whom he had completely under his control, pulled ashore and landed their cargo. Roberval himself superintended the selection from the ship's stores, and thrice did he order the boat to return, each time with as large a load as it could carry.

All this time the rest of the crew stood gaping with astonishment, unable to imagine what Roberval's intentions might be, but ready, at the slightest addition to their superstitious fears, to fly into open mutiny.

At last the boat returned from her third trip. Roberval, in the meantime, had ordered the women to get ready to go on shore, and they now came on deck, bewildered with surprise, and uncertain what fate might be in store for them. Roberval commanded them to enter the boat, which was now alongside. A murmur of dismay and sympathy went round the vessel, as the full horror of his project dawned upon the crew; but no man dared to interfere, save Père Lebeau. Undaunted by his rebuff of a few days before, the priest stepped up to De Roberval, and fixing his eyes full upon him, he exclaimed:

"Sieur, beware what you do! What are your intentions towards these helpless women who have no other protector but yourself? You cannot be so lost to all sense of honour and chivalry as to abandon them to perish on this desolate shore! How can you expect the blessing of God upon this enterprise if you wilfully do this great wrong? Take care lest the Church should refuse to pardon you, and should cast from her fold the man who could be guilty of so monstrous a crime."

For a moment Roberval's gaze shifted under the scathing indignation of the priest, then, drawing him hastily aside, he muttered in an undertone:

"Spare your wrath, good Father; I but mean to teach them a lesson. I will return for them in good time—I swear it. It is but a necessary

discipline that I would give them, so that they may learn to obey me for the future."

"They will die of terror!" said the priest. "You have heard the legends of the demons who haunt the island; and how do you know to what perils you are subjecting them from the savages, if not indeed from evil spirits?"

"There are no signs of habitation in the island," said De Roberval, impatiently. "My men have explored it thoroughly. No Indians have ever been there, and a good fright will do them no harm. Demons," he went on, raising his voice so that all could hear, "what care I for demons? Our blessed Lord cast seven of them forth out of Mary Magdalene, and methinks that this strumpet and her companions have each seventy times seven still in their disobedient bodies. But ashore they shall go. Plead not for them; your prayers will be in vain."

The priest would have spoken further, but Marguerite, who now understood her uncle's design, came forward with the courage and dignity which seldom failed her, and, with head erect and unwavering voice, said calmly:

"Distress yourself no longer on our account, good Father. I welcome with joy any fate which will deliver me from the tender mercies of a tyrant. This, then," and she turned her clear gaze upon her uncle, "is the father's care you show an orphan child? This is the protection you extend to that other fatherless and motherless girl so lately left in your charge? Can it be that a De Roberval has sunk to so ignoble a breach of honour and faith? I pray God," she went on more softly, "that He may drive out the evil spirit which has possessed you, and restore your noble and generous nature. You are no longer the uncle I once loved."

She ceased speaking, and quietly allowed herself to be lowered into the boat. Marie, weeping bitterly, followed her, and finally old Bastienne, filling the air with sobs and lamentations, was deposited beside her mistress. The men took up their oars, and waited the signal for departure.

Roberval was gloomily pacing the deck. His niece's words had gone home, and he was on the point of relenting. But he had already allowed his weakness to turn him once from his purpose, and to fail again, in sight of his assembled crew, was too great a humiliation to be thought of. He hardened his heart, and said sternly to Gaillon:

"See them safely landed; take care that they want for nothing, and return quickly. We must be out of this before darkness falls. The wind is rising, and I should not care to be caught on this shore should a storm come up."

The boat made a hurried final trip, and the three women were put off on the desolate beach. The oarsmen needed not Gaillon's words: "Back now, with might and main," to hasten them on their return journey. They pulled for dear life; and through the overhanging mist they seemed to see the shapes of the demons dancing weirdly down to seize their prey. Once back in the vessel the anchor was hurriedly raised, and all hands eagerly assisted in the work of getting under way once more.

But while this was taking place Roberval's heart had devised a yet more cruel vengeance.

"Bring the prisoner on deck," he exclaimed, "and let him see the results of his disobedience."

When Claude stood beside him on the high poop, he ordered him to look at the island, where the three women stood together on the beach. The long confinement in the semi-darkness of the hold had affected Claude's eyesight, and for a moment, as he gazed across the lines of the gleaming waves, he could see nothing. But just as the returning boat reached the ship's side, and the men hastily came on board, he caught sight of the group upon the shore.

"O just God!" he cried, "can this be permitted?"

"Thus," replied De Roberval, "a just God has made me the instrument to chastise vice. Behold, young man, the work of your hands!"

"Were my hands free," said De Pontbriand, fiercely, "I would become an instrument of God to rid the world of the basest liar and tyrant who ever served his master, the Devil."

"I will be generous," said De Roberval. "Free the dog's hands, and let him wave a last adieu to his paramour."

The rusty lock turned, the manacles fell upon the deck, and Claude stood free. But free on an ocean prison, with enemies on all sides! He gave one glance round, met the cruel eyes of Gaillon close behind him, and like a flash plunged headlong into the ocean.

"Shoot the villain down!" shouted De Roberval.

One of the men seized an arquebuse, and levelled it at the struggling form in the water. He pulled the trigger, but no sooner did the powder splutter in the pan than the gun burst in his hands, and a piece of the metal, entering his brain, laid him dead on the deck.

"The demons, the demons!" exclaimed the panic-stricken crew. "The demons claim the swimmer for their own!"

"Let him go!" said De Roberval. "He is too weak to reach the shore. He has saved me the trouble of ending his life, as I should sooner or later have had to do. Now for Charlesbourg Royal. No man will venture to resist my will in future."

The anchor was already raised, and in a few moments *L'Heureux* began to forge ahead, and to widen the space between her and the accursed island.

As Claude had stood on the poop he was plainly visible to the watchers on the shore. They saw him leap into the sea, and heard the report of the arquebuse. Their hearts stood still with fear: but they strained their eyes eagerly across the dazzling surface of the water. Could he have escaped? Yes, there on the summit of a wave, in the wake of the rapidly retreating vessel, they saw him struggling. He was swimming. He was making for the shore. God help him! Holy Mother help him! Blessed Jesu, guide him and give him strength!

Old Bastienne's sobs had given place to fervent ejaculations of prayer; and as she prayed she held before her the cross which King Francis had bestowed upon De Roberval—the precious relic said to have been fashioned from a fragment of the true cross of our Lord.

Bastienne was a pious soul, and, moreover, a quick-witted one. She had heard the legends of the island, which had passed among the sailors, and when she grasped the fact that they were to be put ashore, she made some excuse to return below, crept into De Roberval's cabin, and stole the precious relic from its case, concealing it carefully in her bodice. No evil spirit could come near the place where this blessed piece of wood might be; with this in their possession they were safe from all the powers of darkness. She now held the cross aloft, believing that it would give the swimmer power to reach the shore.

Weakened by his long imprisonment, his arms almost useless through lack of employment, his strength sapped for want of proper nourishment, De Pontbriand was manfully struggling with the salt, green waves. His head was sinking lower and lower, a deadly numbness was seizing his limbs, and his heart was almost failing him when his half-closed eyes caught the gleam of the golden cross, as the setting sun fell upon it, held high in the air by Bastienne. He made no further effort to swim. A good hundred yards intervened between him and the shore. He must husband his strength. The waves, he knew, would carry him ashore; and with just enough motion in his limbs to keep him afloat, he allowed himself to be borne along. But the northern water was chilling him to the marrow; and although he could plainly see the women on the beach, and could hear their prayers and cries of encouragement, he felt himself sinking, and De Roberval's prophecy seemed about to be realised. When within forty feet of the shore his chilled limbs relaxed, his eyes closed, and he disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

But Bastienne had all her wits about her. In her young days she had plunged into the Somme as joyously as the bravest Picard lads, and old as she was her limbs were still strong and sturdy. Without a moment's hesitation, when she saw Claude's strength leave him, she plunged into the water, struck out boldly in his direction, and, just as

he sank from sight, her strong arm grasped him. With all her remaining strength she dragged him after her to the shore, and Marguerite and Marie rushed into the water to their waists to help her with her burden.

Far off in the retreating ship the watchers believed that he had been given a prey to the demons. Passing a headland they came upon a full-grown seal, which slid from the rocks into the sea, presenting to them its half-human face. Believing it to be a demon, they crossed themselves in terror, and as Claude disappeared from their sight they were convinced that it had gone in search of him, and dragged him down into the infernal world.

Meanwhile, Marguerite sat on the shore, with Claude's pale face in her hands, kissing his lips and eyes, and praying the Holy Virgin to restore him, and not to take her last hope from her.

CHAPTER X

For a time it seemed as if Claude were indeed dead. The women chafed his cold hands, and did all that Bastienne's skill could suggest; but their efforts seemed unavailing, and they had almost abandoned hope, when Marie, searching among the stores, found a case of brandy, and hastened to moisten his lips with the liquor. Soon, to their great joy, the blood began to come back to his cheek, and they could feel his heart beat. At last he opened his eyes like one in a dream, and met those of Marguerite bending over him. The nightmare he had just passed through came back to him—the fearful struggle to reach the shore, the sound of the water in his ears, like the ringing of innumerable bells, the feeling of despair that had come over him as he felt himself sinking. Full consciousness returned to him at the sound of Marguerite's voice exclaiming:

"He lives! O Mary be praised, we are saved!"

Saved indeed, but for what? An island prison in an unfrequented ocean, where years might pass before a ship hove in sight. Night was fast drawing in, and they were shelterless, in a dreary, unknown waste, exposed to they knew not what dangers. They were three helpless women, two of them tenderly nurtured and wholly unused to want or privation; and De Pontbriand was in no condition to be of any assistance. Their position seemed indeed desperate, and Claude cursed the bitter fate which had made him the cause of bringing such misfortune on his beloved.

But old Bastienne came once more to the rescue. Her stolid, peasant endurance and ready Picard wit stood the whole party in good stead. She found a flint and steel—for De Roberval had provided for all necessities—and with the aid of the two girls she collected brushwood and dry branches enough to make a huge fire, the smoke of which, rising high into the air, was visible on the horizon from the departing ship. The sailors fell on their knees in terror at the sight, believing it another proof that the demons were consuming their victims with unquenchable flames.

Bastienne soon had Claude's wet clothes dried, and his strength revived by hot stimulants. Provisions they had in plenty—of the rude fare which was provided on ship-board in those days—and the old woman prepared a hasty meal, of which she forced the two girls to partake. But by this time the darkness had gathered round them, and it was impossible to do anything further that night.

Fortunately, the time of year was a favourable one. The weather was warm, even for June; and the storm which Roberval had predicted seemed to have passed over, for the present at all events. The balmy air and clear sky of a Canadian summer night made the prospect of spending it in the open air a much less terrible one than it would otherwise have been. They kept their fire up all night, as a protection, but they met with no alarms, and were unmolested, save by the insects which swarmed in the air around them, attracted by the light. Claude, worn out by fatigue, slept the deep sleep of exhaustion, and Marguerite spent most of the night watching by his side, while the other two women attended to the fire.

The short June night soon gave place to the ghostly, grey twilight before the dawn; and at last the welcome streaks of colour in the east proclaimed to the weary watchers that daylight was again at hand. Their first night in their island home was over.

The morning broke fair and cloudless, and the little colony of four set about surveying their situation, and exploring their new domain. They found it a wilderness indeed—barren, rocky, almost devoid of vegetation, save for the coarse bracken and juniper bushes which grew in patches, and for an occasional clump of birches, stunted pines, or firs. No sign that any human foot save their own had ever visited it could be discovered: and the only animals they met with were hares in abundance, and foxes, both red and black, which scampered away in terror at their approach, and surveyed them from a distance with bright, timid eyes. Sea-birds in great numbers hovered about the cliffs on the shore, and what most aroused their astonishment and interest, were the solemn, ungainly auks, which had their abodes along the beach. These uncouth and helpless-looking birds, disturbed in their occupation of fishing among the rocky shallows, waddled off in alarm at the approach of the

intruders, who were irresistibly moved to laughter at their clumsy movements. No doubt these strange creatures had in part given rise to many a weird tale of the demon inhabitants of the island.

De Pontbriand, whose strength was wonderfully recruited by the long rest and Bastienne's skilful treatment, set about preparing some kind of shelter for the women before another night should descend upon them. His soldiering experiences, and still more his adventures in the wilds of Canada, came to his aid, and he was not long in constructing a sort of rude wigwam, such as he had seen the Indians build wherever they pitched their camps. Fragrant pine boughs made a luxurious couch, and the exhausted girls were glad to throw themselves down and sleep, while Claude kept watch by the fire outside. On the next day, and the two following ones, he employed himself in thatching the primitive dwelling with birch bark and whatever materials he could find which would shed the rain from its sloping sides. For himself, he found a sheltered hollow among the rocks, where neither wind nor rain could affect him greatly, and their stores he disposed among the many similar rocky caverns with which the island abounded.

His preparations were finished none too soon. The clouds which had been hovering about for several days, finally gathered together one afternoon, and rolled in heavy, thunderous masses up out of the southern sky. The air grew dark and sultry, lightning flashed from the depths of the purple cloud-bank; soon the thunder crashed overhead, and the waves lashed themselves in fury against the shore. The storm was upon them in all its might. It was not of long duration, but was followed by a good deal of rain during the night, and the next morning there was a furious gale blowing. The waves rose to such a height that the spray from their crests was dashed over the frail shelter Claude had erected; and he saw that something more permanent and durable must be contrived. Summer would pass, and winter might swoop down upon them out of the desolate north before there was any chance of their being rescued. A dwelling which would be a protection from cold and snow and the biting blasts of a Canadian winter, must be erected. But how? And with what materials? Tools he had in plenty, but how to construct a dwelling out of the stunted and wind-twisted trees, which were all

the timber the island afforded, was a conundrum he saw no prospect of solving.

As it happened, however, fortune favoured him. The very next day, as he wandered along a high, rocky part of the shore, he saw in the shallow water at his feet what seemed to be the hull of a vessel. Making his way down the cliff, he found to his delight that such was indeed the case. No doubt these were the remains of that same ill-fated craft which Laurent, the fisherman, had seen disappear beneath the waves. The timbers had been of good oak, and the waves, breaking them asunder as they rolled in from the mighty expanse outside, had washed many of them high and dry on the shore. There was abundance for a hut, and with these, and the help of what trees he could avail himself of, he had hopes of being able to build a more substantial habitation before the cold weather set in.

In the meantime, his strength came rapidly back to him, and in the long, bright summer days and glorious nights, life still seemed to hold possibilities of joy and hope for the little party. They were supplied with the necessaries of life—though they were careful to husband their stores as much as possible; and Claude was able to vary their plain fare by the addition of excellent fish, and an occasional bird—for they were well supplied with fire-arms and ammunition. The hardy, open-air life seemed to agree with the two girls; and all four vied with each other in keeping up a resolute and cheerful courage, avoiding all reference to the terrors the future might hold in store.

In the cove where the sunken brig lay, Claude had made a rude raft, and with the assistance of Marie, whose strong young arms and bright, courageous spirit were invaluable to him, he soon had enough planks and timber transported to the place where they had landed. To get them ashore, and carried to the spot he had selected as being the most sheltered and suitable for his purpose, was no easy matter; but with time, and the united efforts of the whole party, every obstacle was gradually overcome. The building, although a small one, was slow in attaining completion, and for weeks the sound of Claude's hammer and saw disturbed the primeval quiet of the little northern island. The women lent their help in every

possible way; and watched with admiration the skilful manner in which Claude provided against every emergency which might befall the little dwelling; none gave a sign of the secret and cherished hope of all their hearts, that they might never need to complete it, or to occupy it when completed.

Thus July and August passed; and towards the end of the latter month the "castle," as Marie had gaily designated it, was at last finished. They transferred themselves and their belongings to its shelter, and, as it happened, only just in time. The weather, as usual about that time of year, suddenly changed, and a fierce gale swept across the island. For three days the rain fell in torrents, and the mad waves rolled higher and higher up the beach, till the spot where their summer shelter had stood was completely covered. The nights, too, became cold and dreary; and the dismal shrieking of the wind through the trees, and the hoarse bellowing of the sea among the crags and caves, had a terrifying effect that made it hard for even the brave spirits of these high-born Frenchwomen to preserve their calm and hopeful bearing.

With the shortening days and autumn winds a sadness crept over the little colony, and would not be shaken off. Its influence was, perhaps, most felt by Marie, though her bright vivaciousness never failed her when the others were present. The lovers could not be wholly unhappy while they had each other. Their future was full of uncertainty, and the present of difficulties and dangers, but at least they were together, and separation had been the bitterest of their trials. With Marie it was necessarily otherwise. She could not but feel herself alone, in a sense which was unknown to the other two; and it became her habit, in the mellow September days, to wander by herself along the shore, often sitting for hours, her hands clasped on her knees, gazing in vain at the distant, empty horizon. She had one companion—a young fox which Claude had caught and tamed for her. The little animal had grown devotedly attached to her, and as it grew older it became her constant attendant in all her rambles. Marguerite could not fail to notice the long absences of her friend, and often went in search of her, and brought her back to join Claude and herself in whatever they might be doing; but Marie was always gay and cheerful with her, and no suspicion of the melancholy that

was gradually creeping over her was awakened in Marguerite's heart.

It was upon old Bastienne that the change in the climate began to tell most plainly. The faithful old woman had borne uncomplainingly the hardships which her young mistresses could endure without a murmur; but her old bones had suffered from the exposure to the night dews and damp sea air; with the chill winds of the Autumn she was attacked with rheumatism, and lost the activity and energy which had been of such good service to them all. She suffered much; her moans often kept the two girls awake at night; and even Claude, who had built himself a tiny lean-to on the sheltered side of the "castle," could hear her complainings.

With the first frost of October the leaves took on their short-lived autumn gorgeousness, only to wither and fall, leaving the little island destitute of even its scanty appearance of vegetation. Winter, with its desolating breath, was settling down upon them; and when the first early snows came floating through the air, they realised that long dreary months of suffering lay before them.

But one of them, at least, was to be spared the terrible ordeal.

On a calm, mild day, when the soft, blue haze of October filled the air with its deceptive beauty, Marie had gone to one of her favourite haunts along the cliffs—a lofty point of rock, which they had laughingly christened her "look-out." As she sat there, gazing down at the misty, sleeping sea below, her eye caught the gleam of a cluster of late-blooming wild flowers, the last of the season, on a point of the rock beneath her. A fancy seized her to get it for Marguerite. She reached over, and had it almost in her hand, when a slight movement behind her caused her to start a little, lose her balance, and fall headlong over the beetling cliff. She fell upon the stones below, and lay motionless, while the little fox, whose rustling approach among the dry leaves had caused her hurried movement, stood on the edge above, peering down with astonished curiosity at the silent figure of his merry playmate. The auks and puffins, scared from their rocky perches, plunged into the ocean, and rose at a little distance to look for the reason of the disturbance. Seeing no further cause for alarm they gained courage and gradually returned, and

their quaint, ungainly forms stood in wondering groups about the motionless girl, who lay with one arm stretched in the cold water of the bay.

In the meantime her friends were awaiting Marie's return for the mid-day meal. But she came not; and they finally went in search of her, calling her name along the shore, but receiving no answer save the wild cry of the gull as it circled above them, and the weird laugh of the great diver calling to his answering mate. They knew her favourite point of rock, and on reaching it found the little fox still standing on the edge, and looking down. As they approached, it bounded suddenly off, and disappeared among the bushes.

His heart sinking with a vague dread of fresh misfortune, Claude went to the edge of the cliff, and looked over. He saw at once what had happened. The stones at the top were loose and freshly disturbed, and the low shrubs which fringed the rock were crushed and broken. Hastily drawing Marguerite back, and bidding her return at once to the hut and warn Bastienne to get restoratives and blankets in readiness, he hurried round to the base of the cliff. The tide was rapidly rising, and the distance was considerable. With all his haste he was only just in time. As he rounded the projecting spur that formed one side of the bay, the water, which had at first covered only one of Marie's arms, reached her hair, and in a few minutes more must have risen over her face. De Pontbriand drew the bruised and senseless form higher up the rocks, and eagerly felt her heart. There was a faint, slow beating that told him a feeble life still fluttered there. Raising her in his arms he bore her with all possible speed to the hut, where every means that their resources and skill could suggest to restore her to consciousness was tried, and, as it seemed, in vain. At last, as the short October afternoon faded out in a purple haze, and the sad, grey evening closed about them, Marie opened her eyes. She was quite conscious, and seemed to suffer no pain. But the end was evidently close at hand. She spoke but little, and lay very quietly, with Marguerite's hand in hers. Just before it grew too dark for them to see her, she beckoned to Claude to approach, and as he stood beside her couch, she laid Marguerite's hand in his, smiled peacefully as she felt the strong grasp close above it, and, closing her eyes, with head turned a little aside, she passed

away so tranquilly that they could not have told when her last breath was drawn.

When they realised that she was indeed dead, their grief had no words. Old Bastienne, at the foot of the couch, recited the prayers for the dead in a voice choked with sobs, and with the tears streaming down her wrinkled cheeks; but Marguerite knelt in silence, dry-eyed, beside the body of her friend, gazing into the quiet, calm face. At last Claude raised her, and, tenderly wrapping a cloak round her, led her from the hut, and down to the beach. They stood in silence, trembling in each other's arms, their hearts too full for speech or tears, while the chill October wind whistled in from the sea, and the gulls and curlews flew screaming about their heads.

CHAPTER XI

That same night, about the hour that Marie breathed her last, Charles de la Pommeraye was riding furiously along the road leading eastward to Paris, where the King was holding a temporary court. He rode all night, and just as the first faint streaks of morning revealed in the distance the grey outline of the towers of Notre Dame, his horse thundered into the sleeping city.

He had had a weary voyage home; what winds there were had been adverse; for nearly a month Cartier's vessels had lain becalmed in mid-ocean; and it was not till the end of August that St Malo, with its towering walls and rugged battlements, was reached.

The three vessels had been joyously welcomed by the Malouins. The merchants who had made large advances to the daring adventurers, in the hope of being recouped from the treasures of the New World, felt a momentary pang at their losses: but private disappointment was forgotten in the public rejoicing at the safe return of their daring and world-famous fellow-townsman, Jacques Cartier.

La Pommeraye found but little pleasure in these festivities. He was possessed by the one idea of seeing Marguerite as soon as possible. Absence had in no way dimmed her image in his mind; fickle and impressionable as he usually was, the best and noblest part of his nature had been awakened by his love for the beautiful girl whom he had met under such unusual circumstances, and of whom he had as yet seen so little. Now that fortune seemed to be favouring him, he cursed every obstacle that kept him an instant longer from her side. At the earliest opportunity he made his escape from the enthusiastic and admiring Malouins; and having disposed of a quantity of rich furs which he had purchased at Tadousac before leaving the St Lawrence, he bought a horse, and set out for Picardy—as the most likely place to hear news of Mdlle. de Roberval, even if he did not find her at the castle.

In order to get away as soon as possible he was obliged to give Cartier the slip. The latter was anxious to proceed at once to court, to report the failure of his attempt to found a colony, and to request

permission to return and bring back De Roberval. It would be out of the question, however, to start before the spring, as the season was now so far advanced; and La Pommeraye decided to let Cartier go to court without him, as the winter would give them plenty of time to consider their plans.

He incidentally learned that Roberval had sailed from La Rochelle instead of St Malo, as he had supposed; but the idea that he might have taken his niece with him naturally never entered his head, and no one in St Malo was able to give him any information.

Accordingly, one morning early in September, he mounted his horse and set out on his long ride to the banks of the Somme. It was a long journey; but love let him rest nor day nor night till he had arrived at the end. Nor did he accomplish it without adventure. One morning, about a day's ride from his destination, he met two gay cavaliers, with finely caparisoned horses, speeding on their way to Paris. They saw the dust-stained horse, and dustier rider, and, thinking it would be fine sport to whet their blades on his clumsy sword, bore down upon him.

But they had miscalculated their man; and as the first gallant checked his horse within a few feet of La Pommeraye, his heart grew weak within him as he saw the determined eye and smiling lips of the man he had expected to see turn and flee before him.

"Have at thee, my dainty cock-robin!" said La Pommeraye. "Methinks the smoke from yonder hostel bespeaks a ready breakfast, and I shall do greater justice to the meal after a little exercise. Have at thee!"

The young nobleman grew pale to the lips, but manfully faced the trial he had himself invited. Their horses danced about each other for a few moments, sparks flew from their flashing blades, but the contest was an unequal one. The youth tried hard to reach the breast of his opponent, but his every thrust was met by a determined guard; and when La Pommeraye thought the breathing-time before breakfast had been of sufficient length, he made a few quick passes that the young man's eye could not follow, struck up his antagonist's sword, made a lightning thrust at a broad silver ornament that

adorned the gay rider's breast, pushed him from his horse, and laughed a merry laugh as the lad sat up in the dusty road, wondering at his escape. His companion, who had stood by enjoying the contest, heartily joined in the laugh.

"Nobly done!" he exclaimed in admiration, "you handle your sword as if you had been wont to play before King Francis. Henri, thou art not an apt pupil; thou should'st have used thy horse more, and trusted less to thy arms. If Monsieur is not tired with the contest, would he be pleased to measure swords with me? He will find me no mere lad."

"With all the pleasure in life," said Charles, smiling, "But I fear me the bacon at yonder inn will be burnt to a crisp unless I hurry on my way; so draw at once; I have not time to bandy words."

"Have a care, Jules," cried Henri; "he is the Devil."

La Pommeraye caught the name.

"Have I the honour to cross swords with Jules Marchand?" said he. "Your fame is not unknown to me; and were it not for the fact that I am in haste to be at my journey's end, I would fain prolong the fight; as it is, it must be short and sharp."

Like a flash his weapon shot out; like a flash the other met it. But though the swordsman was La Pommeraye's equal in skill, he lacked brawn; and, they had scarce played for a minute's space when Jules Marchand's sword was wrenched from his hand, and he was left sitting, black with wrath, upon his charger, which whinnied as if in recognition of his master's mishap.

"Pardon, gentlemen," said Charles, smiling, "I must not dally longer by the way. Were you not going in the opposite direction, I would invite you to breakfast with me. But beware, hereafter, how you attack lone travellers; were it not that France, now that Spain is once more in arms against her, needs every man who is able to bear a sword, I should have left one of you, at least, by the roadside."

So saying, he waved the two gallants a laughing adieu, and rode away.

"The Devil, or La Pommeraye," said Jules.

"Neither! Too merry for the Devil," answered Henri, "and La Pommeraye, we heard, was killed in Paris."

"Nay," replied Jules, "that report was false. But it is true that he is no longer in France. Guillaume Leblanc saw him on board one of Cartier's ships, making for the New World. I was glad of the tidings, I have to confess. His skill and strength made me dread meeting him; and his departure left me the first swordsman in France; for despite De Roberval's reputation, he was of an old school, and easy to defeat. But now it seems I am but a poor second. But let us to Paris, and find out who this dashing cavalier may be."

La Pommeraye continued his journey, and loitered but little on the way till Picardy was reached. A few of Roberval's retainers were about his castle; and from them he learned that the nobleman had not only gone to the New World himself, but had taken his niece with him.

The news fell on him like a thunderbolt. Thousands of miles of stormy sea lay between him and the face that haunted his dreams. As he thought how near he had been to her in the harbour of St John, his heart bounded madly within him, and his eyeballs beat upon his brain.

But he was not long in planning a course of action. He would hasten to court, and find means of returning to the New World at once. Destruction only could await the colonists, and he shuddered as he thought of the tenderly-nurtured girls exposed to the fierce storms and bitter cold of a Canadian winter.

So his good horse was saddled once more, and the measured beat of its hoofs became swifter and yet swifter as Paris was neared.

Once in the city, he lost no time in presenting a request for an audience with the King, and the announcement of his name, and the nature of his errand, readily gained him admission to Francis' presence.

He found that Cartier had been before him by a few days, and had urged the necessity of recalling Roberval, and the hopelessness of any attempts to colonise the New World. The King had been greatly disappointed by the downfall of all the hopes and brilliant prophecies with which the expedition had started. He had rewarded Cartier's bravery and enterprise with the promise of a patent of nobility, but seemed reluctant to encourage the idea of withdrawing the second detachment of colonists. He was inclined to suspect that jealousy of De Roberval, and disappointment at his own failure, had something to do with Cartier's anxiety to break up a scheme on which his heart had been set a year before. La Pommeraye saw his hopes receding into the distance; his heart sank within him.

"But what thinks the Duke of Guise?" said the King, suddenly, turning to that veteran nobleman, who was now his chief adviser, occupying the place that Anne de Montmorenci had so long filled.

The Duke had been standing silently by during the interview, regarding La Pommeraye with a meditative air.

"Methinks, sire," he answered, "that there is much wisdom in what the young man urges. Already we have cast too much good treasure away in these vain enterprises; and now that Spain needs our utmost attention, we can spare neither men nor money for schemes of foreign colonisation."

"You hear, M. La Pommeraye," said Francis, "what the Duke says; but we had hoped to fill our coffers with the riches of Canada."

"May it please your Majesty," said Charles, "there are no riches there, save a few furs and fish. These might serve to give a St Malo or Rochelle merchant enough wealth to retire on, and provide for his daughters, but would not go very far towards fitting out a battalion. I had had great hopes of the enterprise, but the experiences of last winter have taught me that nothing is to be gained by our struggles to colonise the barren North. The noble fellows who are wasting their lives in that sterile land, with only murderers and robbers as companions, would be far better in France, protecting her shores from foreign invasion."

"There is truth in what you say," answered the King, after a moment's pause. "We are much in need of De Roberval. The Picards worship the 'Little King of Vimeu,' and if he does not return, we fear we shall get but scant funds and few troops from the sturdy men of his province. But what is it that you would have?"

"A ship, Sire," promptly replied La Pommeraye, "manned and provisioned for a voyage to Canada, and permission to Cartier to return in it, and recall Roberval to France."

"*Parbleu!*" said the King, "a modest request! Well, we will consider the matter, and see what course it will be best to take."

"But, Sire," said Charles, his distress and anxiety getting the better of his diplomacy, "the winter draws near, and unless we start at once we shall not be able to reach Charlesbourg Royal till spring."

As he finished speaking, the Duke of Guise, who had been conversing aside with some one near him during the last few sentences, turned to the King.

"May it please you, Sire," said he, "this mad nephew of mine is desirous of a favour at your hands. It seems he owes his life to this gallant gentleman, and he prays me to entreat you to grant him whatever he requests."

As he spoke, Charles recognised in the gay young cavalier, who now came forward, his discomfited antagonist of the adventure on the road to Picardy.

"We have met before," said he, bowing to La Pommeraye. "Sire, this is none other than the redoubtable swordsman whose deeds have been buzzed through the court for a week—to the lasting chagrin of Jules Marchand. Uncle, if you love me, you owe him a debt of gratitude. That I am not at this moment in heaven, praying for your soul, is due solely to his generosity."

"Nay," interrupted La Pommeraye, "my generosity saved you not; it was the silver star you wore on your breast. I had intended to run you through; but that sparkling bauble caught my eye, and I could not resist the novel experience of tilting at you with my rapier."

A hearty laugh, in which the King joined, rang out from those who stood near, for all knew of the adventure which the mirth-loving Henri of Guise had related with due embellishment.

"We have not had so good a joke since we came to Paris," said Francis, "as that encounter has furnished us. Your doughty deeds deserve a reward. The ship is yours, and Cartier has our permission to go; but we shall not compel him to leave France unless he wishes. And as for manning the vessel, you will have to find some other means, for every son is needed to protect France from our Spanish foes."

So it came about, that at the end of September La Pommeraye found himself once more crossing the Sillon, with power to purchase a ship and start at once to bid Roberval return to France. His first proceeding was to seek out Cartier, and inform him of his successful mission.

He found, however, that the experienced and wary seaman was not to be persuaded into undertaking the voyage before the spring. He displayed small warmth over the concessions of the King; and declared that, owing to the unforeseen delays which had retarded them on the voyage home, it was now so late that it would be madness to attempt to cross the ocean before the winter set in.

"In any case," he said, "De Roberval cannot do otherwise than we have done. This winter will prove to them that their efforts are in vain; they will be forced to return in the spring."

"But," said La Pommeraye, "think of the noble women with them! The winter will kill them!"

"I did not know they were with Roberval," said Cartier. "I supposed he would have had the good sense to leave them behind."

"I have been in Picardy and in Paris," returned Charles, "and I have learned beyond a doubt that they went with him. We must reach them at once, or the scurvy, cold, or Indians will surely destroy them."

"We shall have to trust to Providence till spring, at all events," replied Cartier. "We could not reach the Gulf of St Lawrence before the ice makes. It would be October before we should get under way, and you remember the Hochelaga was bridged just one month later last year. No vessel need hope to make the arduous journey across the Atlantic in less than six weeks."

La Pommeraye, in his impulsiveness, had not thought of this; and as the truth of the sailor's words flashed upon him, he felt that his friends were doomed.

He accepted the inevitable with what stoicism he could, and unable to stay in St Malo, he returned to Paris to fill up his time as best he might until spring arrived. But the gay life about the court had no fascination for him. Dice and the wine-cup failed to attract him, and women marvelled at the handsome young Hercules who displayed such indifference to all their charms. Excitement of a manlier sort he must have; and although there were no battles of any great importance to be fought, the frontier engagements gave abundant opportunity for such swords as his. His old renown soon returned to him; and tales of his wondrous daring found their way to Fontainebleau, to be marvellously enlarged on by his staunch friend and admirer, Henri of Guise.

But he never swerved from his purpose, and as soon as the March sun began to warm the soil, he turned his horse's head towards St Malo.

On his arrival there, he found to his surprise that Cartier was no more enthusiastic over the expedition than he had been in the autumn. That insatiable wanderer seemed at last to have had enough of adventures by sea and land. He had received his patent of nobility from the King, and since the sufferings and discouragements of his last voyage, the prospect of comfort and honours in France seemed to hold more inducements for him than the idea of once more facing the dangers of the deep. His limbs were not so sturdy as of old, his eye had lost something of its keenness, and the hardships and anxieties of the last winter had left their mark upon him. He had money enough to support him to the end of his days, and he had purchased the seignorial mansion of Limoilou—that ancient stone

house which is still pointed out with pride by the Malouins as the residence of their great sailor. When Charles arrived, he was just about to instal himself and his family in his new abode.

He was willing to sell him his good ship, *L'Emerillon*, and to do all in his power to further the success of his efforts, but he was so evidently reluctant to tear himself away once more from the peaceful home, whose comfort he was only beginning to appreciate, that Charles resolved not to keep him to the letter of his promise, but to undertake the voyage alone. A capable sailing-master, Gaspard Girouard, was found, *L'Emerillon* was soon fitted out; and as she was ostensibly merely going to Canada to bring back a load of furs, more hardy seamen than were necessary flocked to join her on her voyage.

The April breezes wafted them across the Atlantic without mishap. They intended to take the southern passage, but a savage spring gale blew them far out of their course, and they steered away for the Straits of Belle Isle. The sailors saw, as they skirted the Newfoundland coast, a distant rocky island on the horizon. As Charles gazed upon it he noticed smoke curling upwards.

"What strange places," he said, turning to Girouard, "these naked savages select to abide in! I have wandered much in the wilds of Canada, but never came on a place that seemed too desolate for them."

"No savages make those fires," said an old sailor who was standing by. "Yonder is the smoke of hell. That is the Isle of Demons."

La Pommeraye laughed at the absurd superstition, and kept his eye fixed on the distant point of land with the column of smoke, which seemed to grow larger with each moment. But darkness soon fell upon the ocean, and the dim outline of the island at last faded from his view.

Had he but known! That smoke was a signal from the weary watchers on the island, who, on one of the unhappiest and saddest days of their desolate lives, saw in that distant sail hopes of release from their cruel prison. Eagerly they heaped up a huge fire to attract

the passing craft, little thinking that it was in search of them that she was speeding on her white-winged way.

In a few days *L'Emerillon* had passed from the Bay of St Lawrence into the river of Hochelaga. A favouring wind bore her on past the deep, black mouth of the Saguenay, and soon the Isle of Bacchus was spread before the sailors' weary eyes, green, beautiful, and fresh, with the high Falls of Montmorenci leaping wildly down on the opposite shore. On to Charlesbourg Royal they sailed; and a horrible dread seized La Pommeraye as he approached the place. A dead silence reigned on the steep banks of the broad river. A substantial structure now stood where Cartier had had his rude fort, and its two towers loomed up before the eyes of the Frenchmen. Other buildings could be seen here and there, but no living soul appeared in sight; and in the anchorage, where he had looked for the ships of the colonists, not even a canoe could be seen. Could they have grown tired of the life here, and started further up the stream—to Hochelaga, perhaps? But no time was to be lost. When the silent shore was within a stone's throw the anchor was run out, and the vessel rested from her long journey. A boat was lowered, and La Pommeraye went on shore and explored the castle-like structure that crowned the heights, the empty halls and chambers, the gaping shelves and bins in the storehouses, the deep and vacant cellars, the great ovens, and the two silent watermills, all told him of the hopes which had filled the heart of De Roberval. Everything had been carefully removed from the place, and there were evident traces of Indians; but as there were no marks of a struggle, and no dead to be seen, Charles concluded that they had merely visited the place to pick up whatever the whites had chanced to leave behind.

A rude plot of ground, with several new-made graves, told him that King Death had visited the young colony, and the high gallows in the square hinted that the stern-willed nobleman had helped the cold and scurvy to lessen the population.

Charles would not return without making sure that his friends had left the New World, and so, after a fruitless search for natives, who seemed to have betaken themselves to better hunting-grounds, he boarded his ship, weighed anchor, and rested not till he was within

the shadow of Mont Royal. Here he met a chieftain, Agona by name, whom he had formerly known, and who had taken the place of old Donnacona. From him he learned of De Roberval's sufferings and failure. He could learn nothing definite about Claude or Marguerite, but as there had been other noblemen in the colony, he did not so much wonder at that. But there was no doubt that they had all departed. His journey had been in vain; and with a heavy heart he set about retracing once more all those weary miles which lay between him and the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XII

Having left his niece and her companions on the Isle of Demons, Roberval had steered his course for the Hochelaga, and about the middle of June the rocky heights of Stadacona loomed up before him. His tyrannical severity on the voyage had made all his men stand in awe of him, and his lightest word of reproof would make the most dogged villain on his vessel tremble for his neck. All were indeed glad when the anchors were dropped off Cap Rouge, and none more so than Roberval himself.

The narrow limits of his vessel's deck had preyed upon his ambitious spirit; and the horrors of the voyage, caused by his own self-will and stubbornness, stood before him like a nightmare. Scarcely had the Isle of Demons sunk from sight on the horizon, when his conscience began to prick him; and he would have returned for the women whom he had set on shore, but he feared lest his followers should think that there was in him the milk of human kindness.

Most of all he dreaded Gaillon. He knew that he had placed himself to a certain extent at the man's mercy, and that fact alone was enough to awaken in him a deadly hatred of the cringing scoundrel, who dogged his footsteps like a shadow. He resolved to get rid of him at the earliest possible moment; and yet he dreaded to take any steps towards removing him. He remembered the sudden and mysterious death of the young Picard sailor; he remembered also Gaillon's offer to rid him silently and surely of all his enemies. The man was a poisoner, a demon who worked in the dark, without soul, without honour. On board ship Roberval felt more or less assured of safety; but as his destination drew nigh he made up his mind that, once on land, Gaillon must be put out of the way, or he would not be free one moment from the terror of assassination.

Gaillon himself was quick to divine all that passed in Roberval's mind. His vigilant eye took notice of the slightest signs which revealed the nobleman's attitude towards him; but no change in his own manner and bearing could have been observed, except that he was, if possible, more servile and obsequious than ever.

Matters were in this state when the vessels passed up the Hochelaga, and the towering heights of Stadacona loomed up, majestic and strong, before them. De Roberval's quick eye noted at once what a magnificent place this would be for headquarters for his colony; but as he skirted the high cliffs, a shower of flint-headed arrows fell on his deck, and warned him that the red men welcomed him as an enemy. To terrify them, he sent a broadside from his guns against the huge natural fortress, which re-echoed with the unwonted sound, and the frightened Indians fled far inland to escape the unusual thunder.

At Charlesbourg Royal the French landed without opposition. Busy hands soon made habitable the rude dwellings which Cartier had left; from the first streaks of dawn till the sun sank behind the hills of the St Lawrence, the shouts of men, the singing of saws, and the clanging of hammers resounded over the broad river. A somewhat pretentious village rose on the heights; and in the centre of it, in place of the flimsy structure designed by Cartier as a gallows, stood a strong, black erection, ominously awaiting a victim.

It had not to wait long. The more devoted and cringing Gaillon became, the more did Roberval's uneasiness and distrust of him increase. Anxiety and remorse had actually disturbed the balance of the nobleman's mind. He realised that he was not himself, but felt convinced that he could never regain his self-control, or know a moment's peace of mind, till he had got rid of the vile wretch whom he had in a manner taken into his confidence, and who haunted his sleeping and waking hours. Chance placed an opportunity in his way.

Although the colonists had brought plenty of powder and ball with them, they were ill provided with food for a protracted season. They had expected that Cartier would have an abundant crop growing round his establishment, but they found that he had not even broken the soil that year. They found, too, that the Indians held aloof, and would do naught to help them. The few stragglers whom they could attract by "firewater," had no stores of food, as they were too inert to till the soil, and depended merely on game and fish; feasting while it was abundant, and starving when it was scarce.

Roberval was a man of shrewd foresight. He carefully gauged his supplies, and saw just how much could be allowed each man to carry him through the long autumn and winter months; then he sent forth an order that any man taking more than his allowance would meet with severe punishment. Shortly after the order had been issued, it was discovered that some one had entered the stores by night, and taken a quantity of provisions. A watch was secretly set, and a few nights afterwards the thief was caught, and proved to be no other than Gaillon.

Seeing the direction Roberval's thoughts were taking, and that his schemes for advancement were hopeless, the man had resolved to desert the colony; and to that end had begun to secrete a supply of food sufficient to support him till he could join one of the wandering bands of Indians further up the country. He was brought before Roberval, who immediately ordered him to the gallows. The wretch fell on his knees, but Roberval was deaf to entreaties and curses alike.

"To the gallows with him!" he repeated. "We are well rid of such a villain."

Gaillon's character was well known, and no one pitied his fate. Scarcely a man in the colony did not breathe more freely when he knew that it was beyond his power to work any further mischief; but they shuddered as they looked upon his dangling form, and wondered who next among them would meet a similar fate.

In the meantime, De Roberval had not forgotten his promise to return for his niece. But he had greatly miscalculated the distance and the time it would take a ship to go and return. In the present condition of the colony it would be utterly out of the question for him to be absent in person for so long a period. He had no difficulty, however, in finding one or two of the young noblemen who were willing to undertake the expedition; but an obstacle presented itself on which he had not counted. Not a man among the sailors could be found who was willing to return to the dreaded spot. Threats, commands, persuasions were alike in vain; no power on earth could have induced the crews to venture near the place where they had

seen with their own eyes the flames of hell, and the demons hastening to claim their victims.

Roberval dared not attempt force. Able-bodied seamen were too few and too precious to risk the loss of even one. He was obliged to give up the attempt, and to resign himself to all the horrors of remorse. Whatever he may have felt he kept it to himself, and no man dared open his lips on the subject.

Winter set in, and proved a terrible one for the inhabitants of Charlesbourg Royal. They suffered keenly from the cold; and their miseries were greatly increased by the scarcity of food. Few dared go beyond the walls to seek supplies, as the prowling savages were ever ready to cut them off. They lived, too, in constant dread of De Roberval's iron rule; and for the slightest offences they were brought to the whipping-post, cast into the guardhouse, chained hand and foot, or led shivering to the gallows. Scurvy, too, broke out, and no Indian could be found to direct them to the tree whose virtues had once saved the remnants of Cartier's crew. They fell like the brown leaves before the frosts of autumn; and the feeble arms of their suffering and half-starved comrades made the walls resound with the dull thud of the pick, as they almost daily cut into the hard, frozen ground, to make ready graves. Those of gentler blood had nearly all succumbed, and no priest was left to give the last rites to the dead. When spring came, almost half the colony had disappeared, and those who survived were naught but living skeletons.

When the ice had left the river, and the snows the land, Roberval determined to make an effort to explore the great inland seas which had been depicted on Cartier's map, and if possible to find the spot where the nugget of gold had been discovered. But he had no idea of the distances in this vast continent; and after a month's struggling up turbulent rivers, and over rugged stretches where the foot of white man had never before trod, he returned disheartened to his settlement. Here he found that the men he had left in charge had been taking advantage of his absence to hold high revels, and the wildest confusion reigned in the fort. Disgusted and hopeless, he resolved to break up his colony and return to France, his ambition

thwarted, his hopes rudely shattered, and his dreams of glory and renown in the New World faded into nothing but bitter memories and unvailing regrets.

As he sailed down the Gulf of St Lawrence with the handful of men who were left to him, he resolved to make one more effort to return to the Isle of Demons, and learn, at any rate, what he could of the fate of the three women—though he had no thought of the possibility that they might have survived. But when the crew learned whither they were bound, they rose in a body and mutinied. A few of those on board stood by Roberval in his resolve, but they were overborne, some of them struck down; and De Roberval, seeing his own life in danger, ordered Jehan Alfonse, who had returned to his allegiance, a sadder and a wiser man—like his commander—to steer away for France.

And thus, while Charles skirted the north of Newfoundland, De Roberval was leaving the mouth of the Hochelaga; and, sailing westward past the island of Cape Breton, kept on his steady way across the ocean.

On his arrival at La Rochelle, he let the mutineers go unmolested, fearing lest the story of his niece might be noised abroad. When he returned to court he reported that both girls had died in the New World. Rumours of the truth went up and down the land; but the court and the Church were silent, for the King stood in need of De Roberval. The high esteem in which he was held led all who learned the tale to believe that if he had been cruel, his cruelty must have been but the just punishment of guilt; and for the sake of the ancient and honourable name of his house, no one dared ask him any questions.

De Roberval threw himself and all his energies into the new war which was in progress, and in the clash of arms and the excitement of battle tried to drown the nightmare conscience that gave him no rest by night or day.

In the meantime La Pommeraye had arrived at Charlesbourg Royal with the results already narrated. His buoyant nature sank in despair when he became convinced that he and the nobleman had passed

each other on the broad Atlantic. He had come three thousand miles over dangerous seas to look upon Marguerite, and now he must re-travel the same weary distance alone. He bade adieu to Agona, who would have had the fair giant stay with him, and accompany him and his tribe far past the "leaping waters," as they called the rapids at Lachine, for he had planned a great hunting expedition to the inland seas. La Pommeraye would fain have gone with him, but even though he thought Marguerite safe in France, he could not bring himself to stay away from where she was an hour longer than he could help.

So he sailed down the Hochelaga; and as he wished to bring some return for his voyage back to France with him, he turned his vessel's head towards the Saguenay, intending to get a supply of furs from the Indians of that deep, dark river. The rocky heights, based with rolling stretches of barren sand, soon rose before him. Far up, he saw the granite bluffs rising step above step, and he had a strong desire to follow where they might lead; but Marguerite drew him away. Fortunately a cluster of wigwams studded the shores about Tadousac, and La Pommeraye, who had spent a month in that region, with these very tribes, had little trouble in loading his vessel, at small cost, with a valuable cargo of furs. From these Indians, too, he heard tales of Roberval's colony; and as they related in their grave, stoical way the sufferings the French had endured, and the number of men who had fallen beneath the iron hand of De Roberval, his heart was moved with pity for his fellow-countrymen. Of Claude and Marguerite he could learn nothing. According to the Indians' accounts no women at all answering to Charles' descriptions had been with De Roberval; and several Montagnais warriors, who had known Claude when he crossed with Cartier in 1535, and who well remembered the reserved, dark-eyed young Frenchman, declared that he, too, had not been at the colony.

This news greatly troubled Charles, and as soon as his vessel was well loaded, clapping on all sail, he once more sped on his way across the great northern ocean, which had now lost all its terrors for him.

It was September before his ship reached St Malo, and, after leaving her in the hands of the merchants who had put money into the enterprise, he hurried to Cartier, who was in Paris on business, and laid before him all he had seen and heard.

Cartier had more than a suspicion of the reasons which had induced Charles first to come back to France, and then to be in such mad haste to return to Canada. He was a shrewd observer, and had drawn his own conclusions, but discreetly kept them to himself. He now stood looking at his stalwart, handsome young friend and fellow-voyager with a great pity at his heart, and wondered how he could break to him the news of the rumours he had heard.

"La Pommeraye," he said at last, "my arm is not as strong as it once was, or I should be more than tempted to strike a blow at a man whom we once called friend."

"Whom do you mean?" cried Charles, a vague anxiety roused within him at the sight of Cartier's face.

"I mean De Roberval."

"Why, what has he done? Is there bad news? Tell me at once, I beg of you! What have you heard?"

"I do not know what he has done. I have seen no one since his return who was with him at Charlesbourg Royal; but it is rumoured in Paris that neither Mdlle. de Roberval nor Claude de Pontbriand ever reached Canada."

For the first time, as he heard those two names coupled together, a dawning suspicion of the truth rose in La Pommeraye's mind, only to be swallowed up in the undefined and horrible fear suggested by Cartier's final words. He rose, with a face like death, and laid his hand on Cartier's arm.

"Tell me at once what you mean!" he said.

"I know nothing accurately. The only thing certain is, that they did not return with him. I have heard wild tales, with I know not how much truth in them, that he put his niece and her companion ashore

at Cape Breton or Newfoundland, and that De Pontbriand, who could not prevent his dastardly act, threw himself into the sea, and tried to swim to the shore, but sank ere he reached it."

Charles swore a great and fearful oath. Then he walked over to the window, and stood with his back to Cartier, looking out into the street. When he turned round, his face was twenty years older.

"Where is he?" was all he said.

"Act not rashly," said Cartier gently. "It may be mere rumour. I have tried to verify the tale, but each time I have heard it, it has been from some one who was never out of France, and it has been told with so many variations that I have begun to hope that, after all, it has but a very small foundation in fact."

"I have known that all was not right," replied Charles, "ever since I left the Indians at Tadousac. Tell me at once where De Roberval is! I leave no stone unturned till I have found out the truth. Would to God I had killed him that night on the Sillon!"

"The last I heard of him was that he was in Picardy," returned Cartier. "But if there is any truth in the story, you are not likely to hear it from his lips. He landed in Rochelle. Some of his crew are likely to be found in that town; and, at all events, you will be able to trace some of them, and learn the facts before you do anything further."

The advice was undoubtedly wise; nothing could be gained by confronting Roberval with vague accusations. Without a moment's loss of time La Pommeraye hastened to La Rochelle; but he could find no trace of any one who had been with Roberval. The sailors had all gone to sea again; and those of the colonists who were not already in prison once more were on their way to the seat of war. To the front also had gone the one or two gentlemen who were known to have returned from the ill-fated expedition. Strange as it may seem, Charles could obtain absolutely no more definite information than the vague reports which he had already heard.

He learned that Roberval had taken a number of his men back to Picardy with him, and was there doing yeoman service for King

Francis. La Pommeraye had done enough travelling in the past few weeks to exhaust a man of ordinary strength; but he seemed incapable of fatigue. Once more his horse was saddled, and once more he set off on the familiar road to Picardy. The long journey was at last accomplished, and he arrived at the castle as the bleak November winds were sweeping across the land from the English Channel. Roberval was with a small army five miles away; but La Pommeraye recognised in one of the servants, Etienne Brulé by name, the man who had escaped uninjured from the famous encounter with Pamphilo de Narvaez, and who had ever afterwards regarded La Pommeraye as a being of a supernatural order. This man had been with De Roberval on his voyage, and from him, after an hour's cross-questioning, La Pommeraye at last elicited the truth. The remembrance of the horrors through which he had passed, and his terror of De Roberval's wrath if it were discovered that he had related the story of the desertion of Marguerite, seemed to have muddled the poor fellow's wits, and his tale was wild and incoherent. But he stuck manfully to his assertion that he had seen Claude reach the shore.

"The others laughed me to scorn," he said, "and some went so far as to say that they saw the demons drag him down, but I know better. My eyesight is stronger than theirs, and I saw him rescued and dragged ashore by the women. But Monsieur will not speak to the Sieur de Roberval of these things? He foams at the mouth if his niece's name is so much as mentioned; and he would kill me if he found that I had told you about her."

Charles heeded not the man's words. Before his eyes he saw a great pillar of smoke rising up and spreading far over the ocean; he saw his pilot seize the helm and steer away from the dreaded spot. As the vision rose before him he cried aloud in the bitterness of his heart, "O God! Thou art too cruel, too cruel!"

CHAPTER XIII

It was a sad duty that Bastienne and Marguerite had to perform when they made Marie's poor broken body ready for burial. And while they toiled with loving hands within the hut, Claude worked as best he could to prepare a rude coffin from some of the planks which had remained after the building of their dwelling. Each blow of his hammer went to the hearts of the women, from whom this sad calamity seemed to have taken the last ray of hope.

By the evening of the day which followed her death all was ready, and Claude, with an aching heart, dug a grave in the level, grassy sod, just back of the cliff from which she had fallen. All completed, he returned to the hut, and the three watched silently by their dead till morning broke upon them. Shivering in body and mind, they made ready to carry her remains to their island grave, while the wild sea-birds, which flew screaming in the face of the coming storm, seemed, to their saddened hearts, to wail of human impotence.

Bastienne and Marguerite took the head of the coffin between them, while Claude carried the foot, and the mournful little procession left the hut, and climbed the hill on which the grave had been dug. Slowly their burden was lowered into the shallow earth; and, holding the crucifix above it, they offered up prayers for the rest of the soul which had been so suddenly snatched from among them. It was hard to cast the first spadeful of earth upon the coffin. As each pebble struck the lid, it seemed to them as if Marie must feel the blows. But the bitter duty was at last at an end, the last stone was placed on the rude monument which marked Marie's resting-place, and sadly they turned to leave the spot.

The storm had been steadily increasing, and now the mad waves lashed and rolled like mighty, moving mountains upon the shore. The far-thrown spray fell in torrents about their hut. They were chilled to the bone, and sat shivering all day about the great log fire which burned in their huge, out-of-door fireplace. At last the fury of the gale drove them indoors, and all three sat huddled in their blankets, unable to keep warm.

This was but the prelude to winter. But before that dread season settled down in all its northern fierceness, they were to know a few days of happy respite. Next morning the storm had abated, and a bright sun gleamed across the long, smooth rollers that still swept in upon the shore. There was a strange feeling of summer in the air, and Claude, who remembered his experiences at Quebec, when with Cartier on his second voyage, knew that the "Indian Summer," the time set apart by the red men to make their final preparations for winter, was upon them. For a week the warm sun shone through the mellow haze, and for a week, from morning till night, all three toiled to lay an abundant store of firewood about their hut. It was well that they had this work to occupy their time, for the heap of stones, marking the spot where their dead companion lay, weighed upon their spirits. By the end of the week their little hut was almost hidden from view by the great piles of wood they had gathered, and the ringing blows of Claude's axe ceased.

He had not been wrong; it was but a short respite. Scarcely had they finished their preparations when a raw, penetrating wind, that seemed to separate the flesh from the bone, blew down from the north. The birds had now all gone, except the hardier northern ones. Their songs had ceased; naught was heard but the sound of the restless waves, which kept up an eternal moaning, the soughing of the pines, and the wild shrieks of the sea-birds, whose cries seemed to grow drearier with the approach of winter—modulated, as it were, to the weird north wind.

The three were now forced to remain inside their hut, but the great fire which burned at the door gave them no warmth. There was but one course to follow; a fire must be made within the hut. Claude had long dreaded this inevitable thing, and had put off the evil day while he could. He had been in the huts of the Montagnais, at Tadousac, during the depth of winter, and had seen those shivering savages, half blind with the smoke, crouching about a fire in the centre of their hut, while the smoke, after circling their abode, found its way out through an opening cut in the roof. But as winter drew nearer, he could only imitate the red men; and, with great reluctance, he began to build a fireplace inside their dwelling. The task completed, with saw and axe he cut an aperture above it, and, piling a heap of

branches on the stones, set fire to them. The lurid flames for a moment brightened the interior; but soon, half blinded, the women rushed choking into the open air, while the smoke curled upwards, and the warm fire glowed within. There was nothing else to do; they must become accustomed to the discomfort; and, driven in by the cold, they crowded about the blaze. Claude could not but feel how soon such a life must make them even as the red men. Their eyes grew weak and bloodshot; poor old Bastienne became almost blind, and soon could only grope her way about the hut.

Winter in Canada is now a delightful season for those who have the means to resist its fiercer aspects, and can battle with and conquer it. The keen, bracing air, that makes the blood tingle in the veins, and the roses come to the cheek, calls out the latent energy of the Canadian; but even now, for the poor, winter is a source of dread; the savage still sees its approach with terror, and the sick, shut off from the clear air of heaven, pray for its flight. In those early times it was a season to be dreaded by all alike, even along the banks of the broad Hochelaga; but none can conceive, save those who have experienced them, the awful horrors of a winter spent far north on a lonely island in the Atlantic. The cold ceased not, day or night; the wind kept up a continual moaning; the mighty sea swept in with long green rollers, smashed the ice that made about the shores, and heaped it in great, glittering grinding piles upon the beach. The hungry animals prowled about the hut, and fought over the bones which were cast out to them. The hares had changed their coats, and now bounded snow-white across the snow-covered ground. They were dainty eating, and Claude's arquebuse cracked through the woods on the short winter days, as he kept the larder stocked with food—a welcome change after the salt beef which had been set ashore with the women.

Bastienne and Marguerite found some relief from the terrible loneliness which brooded over the island by working, when the light permitted, over their wardrobe and Claude's. They had abundance of clothing for themselves, but Claude had nothing but the garb in which he had swum ashore. The two women contrived, by taking to pieces some of the stoutest of their own outdoor garments, to patch him up a homely suit. Rough, indeed, it was, and Claude felt like the

King's jester when he put it on; but no gay gallants of France were there to see him, and he was even able to smile at the sorry figure he cut.

If ever man prayed for winter to end, it was he. He saw that it was killing the two women, and the sharp pains in his own breast warned him that the bitter, piercing winds had done their work, and that unless relief came soon, he must succumb.

Old Bastienne was the greatest sufferer. Age was beginning to tell upon her; and she, who had been as strong as a horse, now became weak as a child. She went stumbling about her daily tasks. To save "her children," as she called the other two, she exposed herself to the cold and storm; and although Claude begged her not to do work beyond her strength, she would, when he was absent, take his axe and break the logs for the fire, or wade through great drifts of snow to the spring which bubbled, sweet, and fresh, and living, in this land of gloom and death.

The fire in the hut was never allowed to burn out; and towards spring the three were hardly recognisable, so black had they become with the smoke and the fierce blaze of the fire, about which they sat during the long, cold evenings, and often through entire days, when five minutes in the open air would have frozen any exposed parts of their bodies.

But the dull monotony of this ice, and snow, and frost could not last for ever. In early March a faint feeling of spring was perceptible in the air; the sea sounded less dread; the birds' cries lost some of their harshness; and before the end of the month they were aroused by a cheery "Pip, pip, pop!" oft and vigorously repeated from the top of their hut. They knew the cry. It was the first robin. Spring was come at last. They went to the door, almost expecting to see the bare ground, and to hear the rustling leaves. But a full foot of snow buried the whole island beneath it; and a winter chill was still in the air, despite the robin's whistle and the warm sun.

The robin was an old friend. He had been the last bird to leave in the autumn, and, when he saw them, he saucily flew to his accustomed feeding-place, expecting his morning meal. Nor was he

disappointed. Day by day they delighted his heart with finely-crushed crumbs of the hard biscuit De Roberval had put on shore with them. Though he came early, spring seemed still far away. No other birds returned for several weeks, not even the mate of this red-breasted fore-runner of summer. Possibly she had been lost on the stormy trip from the mainland; or possibly he had merely been sent ahead as a sentinel to spy out the land, and see if it were fit for its summer residents.

April crept slowly by, and towards the end a few plaintive-voiced sparrows added their songs to the vigorous, self-confident notes of the robin. Soon the whole island one morning burst into song, and spring was indeed with them. The snow had vanished, save in the hollows and in the shaded spots, and the grass here and there began to take on the fresh, living green which rejoiced their hearts.

But spring was to bring small joy to them. Faithful old Bastienne grew weaker day by day. Claude and Marguerite were filled with pity as they saw her sitting, helpless and dejected, on the rude seat near the outdoor fireplace. She could scarcely walk, and the hollow, choking cough, which sounded like a death-knell in their ears, told them she had not long to live. They dreaded seeing her pine and die before their eyes, while they were powerless to help her.

But the gods were kinder to them all than they had anticipated. Coming back one day early in May from a long ramble through the woods, where they had gathered a profusion of wild flowers, Claude and Marguerite found the old servant stretched lifeless on the slope before the door of the hut. She had fallen forward on her face from her accustomed seat near the fire, and was quite dead. There were no marks of suffering upon her features; her end had seemingly been as peaceful as it was sudden, and her spirit had, doubtless, wandered back to the sunny slopes of the Somme, and the broad fields and blooming orchards of her beloved Picardy.

They laid her body to rest beside Marie's, and the faithful old peasant and the daughter of a noble slept side by side—equal in death.

The task completed, the two who were left wandered hand in hand in silence about their lonely island, while on every side the birds fluted joyously, and all Nature rejoiced in the beauty of the spring—unheeding the presence of death.

As Claude gazed longingly over the wide, green waters, far off he noticed a tiny speck, which, at first, seemed like the top of an iceberg. Nearer it came, till it grew definite, and he saw, clearly outlined against the sky, a vessel under full sail, steering towards the straits of Belle Isle. It was the first ship they had seen, and they rushed to their fire, and heaped it high with loads of dry boughs until the flames shot into the air, and the smoke curled upwards in a mighty column, and then spread over the ocean. They hoped to see the vessel change her course and bear down upon their island. But their hopes were in vain. She kept steadily on her way, and before night fell she had vanished from their sight on the horizon.

On the high poop of the ship La Pommeraye paced with rapid, nervous step. Land was in sight at last; he would soon be in the St Lawrence, and with Marguerite. So he thought; while they prayed that the unknown vessel might come a little nearer so that they might hail it.

As the ship passed away, Claude, in his despair, called on God to curse the tyrant who had brought this suffering upon them; and, while he prayed far away in Charlesbourg Royal, Roberval, on the eve of departure, had six of his men stripped to the waist, lined up in the square, and flogged till the blood streamed down their backs. The next morning his ships were bearing away for the Old World, his hopes broken, and his heart within him more savage than ever.

CHAPTER XIV

After the awful disappointment Claude and Marguerite experienced when they saw the vessel of their hopes sink out of sight, they could only turn to each other for silent comfort. Unconscious of whither they went, their feet led them to the top of the high cliff from which Marie had fallen. Trembling on the dizzy verge, each seemed to read what was in the other's mind. A leap, sudden darkness, and all would end. The next world—what of that? Could there be another world as cruel as this?

"Come away!" they exclaimed together, clutching each other's hands. "Come away! Not yet!" And in these words each knew that the other realised that death—the death which for a moment they had courted—was all they could hope for. The ship which had passed was but a chance vessel; the fishermen never came so far north. Their provisions were beginning to run low; and the rigorous climate which had killed poor old Bastienne must in time sap their young strength. Claude was feeling its influence the more keenly. His wounds had left him less robust than of old, and the harsh treatment he had received at De Roberval's hands had helped to shatter his iron constitution. His cheek, once ruddy with health, had grown thin and pale; his limbs were shrunken, and his hands, once so strong and sinewy, had become cold and nerveless. When Marguerite rested hers in them, she could not but feel that for him death was not very far off; but she dared not speak. She saw he did not realise it, and his eye was ever filled with pity for her suffering.

With her it was otherwise. Her will bore her nobly up. Instead of losing strength, she grew more robust. Her step became as light and wiry as that of the fleet-footed fox which stole silently about the island. Her arms, which had never exerted themselves beyond bending a bow in sport, could now wield the axe as skilfully as Claude's. She had lost none of her beauty, but in her rough garb, browned by the sun and wind and sea, she seemed, in Claude's eyes, queenlier than ever. On this night, as she leaned upon Claude's arm, each felt that the strength to endure must come from her, though neither allowed the thought to form itself into words.

When they reached their hut, the terrible loneliness, the blank left by the death of their devoted old companion, so weighed upon them that they once more sought the beach, where the long waves rolled in and broke at their feet, keeping time, in their melancholy rush and retreat, with the ever-recurring wave of sorrow in their young hearts.

"Marguerite," Claude said, pressing her tenderly to him, "this is more than I can bear. You do not blame me, but I know that I am to blame. I knew your uncle, and I should never have allowed myself to bring you to this."

"Hush, dear, you are mad to speak so! Neither of us is to blame. No one could have foretold the lengths to which my uncle's stubborn will would carry him. But, my own, even at this time, each of us can say that we have known happiness. I would have had it otherwise; but had I to live my life over again, I could not have acted but as I did."

"Dear, I know it. But I cannot forget that Bastienne and Marie owe their deaths to me."

"You are gloomy to-night, love! Neither died with a complaining word on her lips. It was not you, nor my uncle, who cut them off, but fate. Dearest, the night wind cuts you keenly," she added, as Claude gave way to a sudden fit of coughing. "Let us return to the house."

"I dread the loneliness," said Claude. "Ah, Marguerite, I am weak to-night, unmanly to-night! I felt at every step I took to the beach that the spirits of those two murdered women were walking beside me, and yet I welcomed them not. I trembled."

"You are indeed weak, my love. But be strong. We have yet a hard fight to fight. We must not give in till we see France."

"See France! I shall never see it! It is hard, when life promised so fair, to have to lay it down away from the camp and the court. I had hoped yet to win myself a name; not for my own sake, but that you, my queen, might be the proudest woman in France."

"I am the proudest woman in the world," she said. "This year of trial has proved my love a king. I have watched you toil and suffer for us

in uncomplaining silence, and the hopeful words which were ever on your lips told how nobly you were fighting. O Claude, I need you! I need you now more than ever! We each must help the other!" She clung trembling to her lover's arm.

Claude braced himself.

"I must not let my gloomy spirit make my love's as heavy as its own. It has passed, sweetheart I feel strong again; and to-morrow I shall be ready to fight the battle anew."

As they walked back in the darkness Claude stumbled, and would have fallen, but that Marguerite's arm held him up.

"How strong you are become, my darling!" he said tenderly. "Had I a sword on shore I would teach you to wield it; and truly, I think, when we get home again another Joan of Arc would be ready to lead the hosts of France."

"'Tis good to see the old spirit return. We shall indeed get home; and it will be sufficient for me to know that my hero is the first in the field, with my glove borne honourably into the thick of the fight."

But though she spoke thus cheerfully her heart was heavy within her; and when, in the night, she woke to hear Claude coughing as he had done on the beach, she knew that the end must be near. In the morning, a greater sorrow awaited her. She found him weak, worn, and feverish, having spent a sleepless night. When he attempted to build the fire, which had gone out during the night, as he was placing a heavy log upon the dry branches, he fell forward on his face, and would have been burnt by the fire he had just kindled but that Marguerite, springing to his side, bore him bodily to the hut. As she laid him down, she saw that her arm was dyed with blood.

Could the end have come already? He was bleeding at the mouth, and she knew that his lungs were affected. She had little experience or knowledge about sickness of any kind, and at first she thought he was dead. But she bravely did what she could to restore him, and was soon rewarded by seeing the languid eyes open with a half-dreamy stare. The minutes seemed like hours before he showed any further signs of regaining consciousness, and it was to her as the

voice of God when his lips parted, and he murmured her name. His hand pressed hers tenderly, lovingly, despairingly. He had had a glimpse of death, and, as he awoke from his swoon, his first thought was of the horrors she would endure till she should follow him. His strength slowly returned, and by noon he was able to sit propped up in the door of the hut, through which the warm sunshine streamed brightly.

"How cold it has become," he said suddenly, with a shiver.

"Let me wrap this blanket about you, dearest. You are weak still, but a little rest will make you strong."

"Your words would drive away any chill breath," he said tenderly, as she arranged the covering about him. "But surely it is strange, with that warm sun streaming down, that the gentle wind should so soon have cooled the air. A moment ago it was as warm as the summer breezes of France. But what means that shouting?"

"I can hear naught," said Marguerite, her heart sinking within her as she became convinced that Claude's attack had left him delirious.

But suddenly she, too, held up her warm hand in the wind. It had indeed grown colder, although the restless ocean seemed to wear a calmer smile than it had done in the early morning. Her ear, too, caught an unwonted sound; it was the screaming of innumerable sea-birds; and as they drew nearer, the loud flapping of their wings resounded through the island. What could their strange appearance mean? While she thus questioned, a sudden coughing told her that the keen blast which had swept across them had left Claude weakened. She went to him, drew him within doors, and wrapped him warmly in the thickest coverings they had; then she sat anxiously by his side. The wind grew colder, and the screaming of birds louder. Both feared some dire calamity—they knew not what. At last a dull rumbling was heard, and then a roaring, a bellowing, a grinding, a crashing, and the sudden falling of a mighty burden, as if a mountain peak had toppled over on their island, which shook and vibrated as with an earthquake.

The two held each other's hands and waited.

"Could it be a ship?" exclaimed Marguerite, suddenly.

"God help the ship that struck with such a fearful crash! But listen!"

The grinding, crashing sound continued to re-echo through the island, while the warm sun gleamed brightly down on the two terrified inhabitants of the hut; the cowering animals slunk trembling to their holes; and the timorous birds plunged into the sea, or circled far out over the peaceful waters.

Marguerite, seeing that sudden destruction had not come to them, nerved herself, and went out to discover the cause of the unearthly din. As she turned her eyes to the northern side of the island, she was almost blinded by the resplendent glare. A huge iceberg, stretching far out to sea, lay hard against the high cliffs, whose base was a hundred fathoms beneath. A myriad birds circled above it, and flew over the island, wondering at the green stretches and the spreading trees, and the strange being who stood alone amidst it all.

The berg was like a series of mountain peaks, which scintillated in the sunshine. Its green base, eaten and worn by the seas, sparkled like emerald, and its innumerable caves and grottos, giving a variety of light and shade, made it seem a veritable fairy realm. The base, worn with many hollows, kept up a continuous roaring as the sea swept about it, and the crashing fragments, which fell ever and anon with loud resounding splash, added to the din. On the cliff lay piled a huge mass which had fallen thundering down when the berg struck the shore.

"All is well, Claude," cried Marguerite. "It is but a berg which has come to visit us in our loneliness. And what a troop of companions it has brought us! The air is thick with feathered friends! Make haste and get strong, dear," she added, as she re-entered the hut, "and to-morrow you will be able to come out and look upon it. A fairer sight I never beheld. Odin and Thor could not have had a grander palace."

"Sweet, that is like you to turn our terror into a jest," said Claude smiling tenderly at her. "But hark!" and as he spoke a low, savage growl reached their ears.

"Give me the arquebuse, quick!" cried Claude, and stretched out his hand for the weapon.

But Marguerite had already seized it. She had learned to take aim and fire as well as any man, and she stood with the gun firmly held in her strong young arms, and pointed towards the door. For one breathless moment—which seemed a year—they waited. The growl sounded nearer, and a swift shuffling of clumsy feet told them that some ponderous animal was approaching. The next instant the object of their dread appeared.

It was an animal such as they had never seen before, or heard of. A she-bear, full six feet in length—gaunt and fierce. It had doubtless been prowling about in its Greenland home in search of food, when it found itself, and the cub which followed it, adrift on this vast berg. The birds, the only other occupants of its habitation, were able to elude it, and so it spent hungry weeks on its slow, southern journey. Scarcely had the berg come in sight of the island when the starving brute, followed by its cub, sprang into the ocean and swam for the shore. As it prowled about in search of seals or fish, it had caught sight of Marguerite. It scented food, and with a fierce growl came shuffling with the speed of a galloping horse towards her.

As she now looked upon it her heart never flinched. She waited calmly till it should be within sure range.

It was a beautiful creature, with a mantle of silvery white, tinged with yellow. As it drew nearer, its long, strong neck, its flattened, elongated head, and small ears and mouth gave it a cruel appearance, while its tongue, lolling out, seemed to be lapping in anticipation the blood of its victims. When it was but twenty yards away Marguerite's arquebuse was raised, and with unflinching nerve she fired at the advancing brute. The bullet struck it, and with a growl it seized its breast with its teeth, as if trying to pull out the thing that had smitten it. The next instant it was at the very door, and its huge form shut out the light, as it was about to pounce upon its prey. But Claude had seized a second arquebuse, and, when the bear was within two yards, fired point-blank into its hairy breast. The bullet entered its heart, and it fell dead at their feet. The cub, which had followed close at its heels, with a pitiful cry threw itself

upon its mother's body, and seeing the warm blood flowing in a great stream, began lapping it up with greedy tongue.

"Bravely done, my queen!" said Claude, as the bear fell dead in the hut. "I would La Pommeraye could have seen your nerve! What a buzz this adventure would cause in Paris!"

"O Claude, it is horrible! See that unhappy little creature drink its mother's life! Dear God, why is life created only to be destroyed?"

As she uttered the prayer, which has gone up a myriad times from a myriad hearts, she turned with a pitying hand to the motherless cub, but at her touch the terrified little creature rushed with ungainly shuffle away, and skulked among the rocks on the beach.

The dead bear was lying almost at the feet of Claude, a ghastly spectacle, and Marguerite felt that she must get it outside the hut. She seized its huge hairy paws, with their black, curved claws, and attempted to drag it to the door. But, gaunt and starved as it was, it was too heavy for her strength, and resisted all her efforts. Claude was in no condition to assist her, and she was compelled all day to move about, caring for him, with the shadow of death in her presence.

Night came, and still the bear lay stretched, cold and stiff, in the doorway. Again she struggled with it, but again her efforts were futile, and there was nothing for it but to let it remain there all night. But in its ghastly presence she could not sleep; and she lay awake listening to the crashing and roaring of the berg, as the waves rose about it, and hearing beside her the quiet breathing of Claude. Worn out by illness and the excitement of the day, he was sleeping like a tired child. Several times, as she looked out on the darkness, she saw a white form moving stealthily back and forth. She knew it was the little cub, and her heart was moved with pity for its loneliness. She heard its step draw nearer and nearer to where she lay, and at last she saw it standing in the door. She moved not a muscle for fear of alarming it, or disturbing Claude; but when she heard it with an almost human wail throw itself against its mother, she could have risen and fondled it. All night it lay there, wondering, no doubt, why that once warm breast was now as cold as the icy home it had left.

When morning broke, Marguerite made a movement to rise, and the cub, in terror, sprang up, lumbered down to the beach, and plunged into the water.

"Poor beast!" she said, "we must try to win its confidence. It will dispel something of our own loneliness."

She left the hut to stir up the embers of the fire, and pondered how she might lure the little bear to her. But it would not come near her, and at her approach dived into the ocean, or skulked behind rocks.

The gentle sleep of the night had worked wonders for Claude. In the morning, when the crackle of the fire told him that Marguerite was up before him, he rose, and to his surprise found his limbs strong and his brain clear. He looked upon the dead bear, and all that had passed came back to him. He stepped over its gaunt form, and stood before Marguerite.

"Oh, you wicked boy!" she exclaimed, when she saw him. "To get up without my permission! You will kill yourself."

"My darling, I am strong again! I never felt better in my life."

"You must obey me, dear," she said firmly. "You are indeed weak, and if you overtax your strength—think what will become of me! To please me, go back and rest till I have prepared your breakfast, and then, if you still feel strong, we will think about letting you stay up."

As she spoke, she laid her hand lovingly in his, and led him back as a mother would her child. He would not disobey; and when he was once more wrapped in his blankets, she kissed him on the lips and eyes, laughingly bade him be good, and went about her work with a lighter heart, feeling that he was indeed stronger, and hoping that the warm summer weather would restore him to perfect health.

By noon he was almost his old self, and even Marguerite's persuasion could not keep him within doors. His strength had not fully returned, but he was able, by resting frequently, and leaning on her arm, to go to the central part of the island, and get a good view of the wonderful berg.

As they looked upon it, the grinding ceased. A warm south wind had come up, and the great mass, catching its breath, slid from the shore, and almost imperceptibly began to move away. They watched it with a feeling akin to sorrow, as the blue water widened between it and their island. It had been something to break the monotony of their existence; and even its loud roaring was a relief from the dreary sameness of their days. For hours they sat there, watching it make its slow way northward; nor did they take their eyes from it till it was but a dim, misty fog-bank on the blue horizon.

They had not been alone. Beneath them, on the shore, squatted the cub, watching its northern home drift slowly away; once it made as if it would have plunged into the waves and followed it, but, seeming to change its mind, paused at the water's edge.

When Claude and Marguerite went back to their hut, they put forth their united strength, and succeeded in dragging the ponderous form of the bear out into the open air. Claude had watched the Indians skin wild beasts with no better implements than their rude flint knives, and had learned the process by which they cured the skins. On the following day he set to work to remove the strong white hide. It took him the whole day, but at night he and Marguerite had the satisfaction of seeing it spread to dry on the roof of their hut. All through that night they heard the piteous cries of the young bear, as it prowled helplessly about. Their own suffering made them sympathetic, and next day both made every effort to coax it to them.

At last the bear-skin was spread, broad, and white, and soft, on their floor. To their delight they found that their new comrade would steal in at night and rest upon the soft rug, creeping away in the early morning, just as the first robin announced that day was beginning to break.

Gradually it grew accustomed to them, and ere a month had passed it would take food from their hands, although it would not allow them to touch it. But before the summer had passed, and the September leaves began to turn, it would crouch at Marguerite's feet, and rest its snout in her lap as she petted and fondled it.

All through the summer Claude grew stronger and stronger. The gods were good to him, for a time was coming when all his man's strength would be needed.

CHAPTER XV

When Roberval returned to his castle, and the great iron gates flew back to admit him, he was amazed to see, standing in the courtyard, the stalwart form of La Pommeraye. He knew that the young man had gone to Canada, and he had hoped that the New World, which had swallowed up so many valiant Frenchmen, would have found him a grave. For a moment he could find no words to address his enemy—for as such he now saw from his defiant mien that La Pommeraye had come. But the old domineering self-confidence returned at once.

"Why loiters a son of France in the paths of peace when the foe, who presses down upon us, calls for every sword in the kingdom?" he exclaimed.

"My sword has never been found in the scabbard when the King had need of it," replied Charles, and he added, threateningly, "nor will it ever be allowed to rust when the weak call for help, or if they are beyond help, for revenge."

Roberval blanched. He saw that La Pommeraye had in some way become aware of his infamous treatment of his niece and De Pontbriand. He knew, too, that the young lion was roused, and that a false step on his part would cost him his life. He suddenly changed his tactics.

"Pardon an old soldier, M. de la Pommeraye," he said, "but I have just come from a hot field where a few such swords as yours would have turned the tide of battle in our favour. I forgot for the moment that you must have but lately arrived from the New World, whither King Francis told me he had sent you to recall me." With an assumed innocence he added: "I am weary from the fight, and the long ride through the mud; but when I have had a night's rest I have much to say to you, and shall expect you in my apartment in the morning. Perhaps you may be persuaded to accompany me back to camp."

"Never! I serve no tyrant!" said Charles bluntly. "My sword has other tasks before it."

"You are bold, M. de la Pommeraye, to stand single-handed in my court and use such language to me. Have you brought any attendants with you?"

"No. I came alone. I had no desire that others should know the cause of my journey to Picardy."

"It is well," said De Roberval, and to himself he muttered: "And no one shall see you go hence. M. de la Pommeraye," he said aloud, "does not wisely to believe all the old wives' tales he has heard. But these things are not for the ears of the world. To-morrow we shall meet, and, after our conference, I have no doubt we shall journey hence together. Etienne will see to your wants. The north tower, Etienne; it is Monsieur's old room."

As he spoke, he leaped from his horse and entered the castle. When he was alone in his room he fell on a couch and groaned in spirit. His sin was finding him out. His fair young niece rose before him, and he seemed to hear her voice as she had bade him farewell. The vision would not down. At length he rose, and, draining a wine-cup, strode up and down the room, muttering defiance at his enemies. "I was but God's servant punishing vice," he said to himself, "and this fool who dares beard me in my stronghold shall feel the weight of my hand. He shall die, and the torture his existence inflicts on me shall end. We shall go hence together, indeed, but he shall be carried forth. I would not even let his body remain within my castle walls."

Kill La Pommeraye himself he knew he could not, but the old honour of the man had become so sapped that he felt little compunction when he resolved to have him murdered under his own roof. He knew that his own life was not safe a moment while La Pommeraye lived; and he knew, moreover, that should the truth of the story get abroad, his hopes of advancement and honour would be at an end. There was no help for it; he had gone too far to retreat. Charles must not be allowed to leave the castle alive.

In Etienne, De Roberval thought he had a faithful ally. Twice had the lad helped him to remove foes whom his rank would not allow him to meet, and yet whom he could not send to the gallows. But he had reckoned without his host this time. Etienne was a faithful

henchman of the House of Roberval, and he had aided his master when he thought the honour of the family was at stake; but ever since the dim mists of the Isle of Demons had faded from his sight, he had, with difficulty, kept his strong, young hands from seizing his master by the throat, and choking his life out. If he honoured the name he served, he worshipped the memory of Marguerite; and now that La Pommeraye had come, as he gathered, to avenge her, he was ready to fall at his feet, to follow him to the ends of the earth, to the very Isle of Demons, if necessary.

Roberval guessed naught of all this. The heavy peasant face, the dull eyes, well concealed the workings of the man's soul when the nobleman called him into his presence, and hinted that he would need his sword the next day. Etienne guessed his purpose at once, and, when the plan was revealed, would fain have run his master through the heart, but his face and eye had an ox-like lack of intelligence.

"Are you ready to risk your life in this enterprise?" said the nobleman. "It is for the honour of the House of Roberval."

"I am at your service, Sieur," said Etienne, quietly.

"You have seen the man to-day, and you know his strength?"

Etienne bowed.

"You must bring three daring fellows with you. Three of the soldiers who accompanied me here to-day will do. You can instruct them. Guide them through the armory, and by yonder passage to this room. The curtain will conceal you. Make no noise; he is a wary foe. When I draw my sword upon him, strike him down ere he can turn. Give him no chance; he is not a man to be trifled with."

Again Etienne signified a stolid assent.

"Away now, and let not your fellows know my signal. A false step will cost them their lives at La Pommeraye's hand. And let not a word escape you, or I will string all four of you to the nearest tree. So, away! and see that you are punctual. Let the good work be well done."

The stoical Picard withdrew from his master's presence, but muttered to himself as he went down the long hall which led to the square: "It will go hard, but I will see that the good work is, indeed, well done."

Charles de la Pommeraye was pretty well worn out by the amount of travelling he had done, and he was glad when Etienne left him, and he could throw himself on his couch to sleep. But the air seemed oppressive. He felt that there was treachery in it, and, rising, he bolted and barred the door of his room, and placed his trusty sword within reach of his hand. Still he could not rest, and tossed about, seeing both the hard face of De Roberval before him, and the rugged outlines of the barren, northern island with the beckoning smoke curling upward.

Midnight came; and when everything was at rest save the clink, clank of the sentry's footfall as he walked back and forth on the wall, La Pommeraye raised himself on his elbow, and listened. A rat seemed to be gnawing at the wall. "Hard food, these stones," he said to himself. "Methinks," he added, as the sound grew louder, "the rat hath strong teeth."

The next instant the moonlight, which streamed in at the high window, showed him a part of the solid wall moving back, and, in the opening, a man, tall, square-shouldered, with a bull-neck, stood silent. Charles' hand found his sword, and, leaping from his bed, he sprang at the intruder.

When Etienne left his master, instead of going to the part of the castle where the troopers were quartered, he went without the wall altogether, and walked up and down in silent meditation. He was planning a course of action, and his slow wit was tardy in mapping it out. La Pommeraye must be warned, and must leave the castle; but how to manage this without calling down on himself the wrath of De Roberval was no easy problem for Etienne to solve. But he soon determined on one part of his plan. He would warn La Pommeraye himself. He would then have the rest of the night to plan his own escape; and perhaps La Pommeraye might be able to help him out of his difficulty.

He knew a dozen ways of entering and leaving the castle without being seen, and stealing in by one of them, he waited till midnight, when De Roberval, who was ever likely to be prowling about, would be almost sure to be at rest. Many of the rooms had secret passages leading to them from outside, and La Pommeraye's was one of these. Etienne could traverse their windings as easily as he could the halls of the interior, and he resolved to seek an entrance to La Pommeraye's room, and tell him the whole story.

He found the bolt of the door after some groping about, but it had long remained unused, and required many vigorous pulls to make it move. At last it shot back, and, as he pressed his sturdy shoulders against the wall, the secret door swung open.

When La Pommeraye leaped forward with drawn sword, Etienne showed no sign of fear.

"It is I, Monsieur," he said, with unmoved slowness.

La Pommeraye lowered his weapon, and exclaimed:

"What brings you here at this hour? I thought you were one of De Roberval's hired assassins."

"So I am, Monsieur," replied the Picard, with grim humour. "I am to head a band of them to take your life."

La Pommeraye laughed.

"And where are your fellows, since you are here to put an end to my career?" he asked.

"Monsieur asks too many questions. I have not exactly come here to assassinate you, but to tell you the time, the place, and the manner in which it is to be done. As to my fellows—my master left the carrying out of the plot to me; and I thought it best to tell you first, before preparing them for the——"

"Slaughter! I see, good Etienne!" and La Pommeraye burst into a hearty laugh at the way De Roberval's servant had outwitted him.

"Monsieur has an interview with the Sieur de Roberval to-morrow morning?" questioned the man.

"Yes, most worthy Etienne."

"In the east tower, in my master's room. I am to admit you to that room; and, having done it, I am to lead three other murderers, like myself," said Etienne, with a grin at his own wit, "by a secret passage similar to the one by which I entered your room just now. We are to await a signal from my master—the raising of his sword—and then we are to fall upon you and make sure of our work. He warned me that if we made a botch of it you would probably send us all to Heaven, and if we let aught be known about it, we should all be hanged; and so, methinks, I had better go be hanged."

Charles could not restrain his amusement at the doleful sincerity with which the last words were uttered. On other lips the closing remark would have sounded like dry humour; but Etienne's voice showed that he expected no better fate.

"So, your master pays me the compliment of hiring no less than four men to kill me," said Charles. "And what do you propose to do, now that you have warned me?"

"I know not, Monsieur. It took me an hour walking up and down outside the gate to get thus far. Another hour's thinking may help me to find some way of escape from the Sieur de Roberval's wrath."

"I fear, good Etienne, he will never forgive you if his plot miscarries. He is not a man to break his promises. Perhaps we may see an easier way out of it than by means of a rope. Who commands the guard to-night?"

"Pierre Dablon."

"Would he let you pass without doubting your word?"

"Ay, that he would! Pierre has too often felt the strength of my arm to doubt my word."

"The way is plain, then! Go to the stables, saddle your master's best and fleetest horse, and put as many leagues between you and this

castle as you can before the time comes to lead your fellows to my death. Tell Pierre you are sent out by De Roberval with a message that brooks no delay, and, seeing you so mounted, he will question you no further. Take this ring, and keep your horse warm till you reach St Malo. Enquire out Master Jacques Cartier; every Malouin can direct you to him. Show him the ring, and he will provide for you till I come. And say not a word of your master's attempt on my life. Let none but Master Cartier's ears hear the story of Mdlle. de Roberval and M. de Pontbriand. The world does not understand. They may still be alive, and we will bring them back; and all France shall hear their story from their own lips."

Etienne could only fall on his knees and kiss Charles' hand in speechless gratitude.

"But, Monsieur," he exclaimed, "will you not come with me? My master will certainly kill you; and the castle is full of cut-throats who will obey him for hire."

"Nay, nay, good Etienne. Away to St Malo. I have a meeting with your master to-morrow. I will find my own way to his room; and in the course of a week expect me at St Malo."

Etienne left him, and in half an hour's time was galloping along the muddy roads, on which great puddles gleamed like silver shields. As he rode on, he pondered what manner of man it was whom he had just left, and how, knowing that his life was in danger, he could loiter in the very stronghold of his enemy.

On the morrow, at the appointed hour, Charles presented himself in De Roberval's room. The nobleman met him with his usual frigid politeness. He was somewhat alarmed at seeing him enter unannounced by Etienne.

"How found you your way hither?" he enquired.

"Etienne Brulé, the faithful fellow who has waited on me since I entered your castle, directed me, Sieur," replied Charles.

"He is indeed a faithful fellow," said De Roberval, with a tinge of irony in his hard voice. "But now tell me more plainly the reason of this visit."

"The Sieur de Roberval knows only too well."

"Impossible, since you have not yet told me. Your vague hints of last night conveyed but little meaning. If you have ought to say, speak out boldly and bluntly, as a soldier should ever speak."

"Yes, and act," said Charles curtly.

"What do you mean?" cried De Roberval.

"If your answer does not satisfy me when I have spoken plainly, you will soon learn my meaning," said Charles.

"Dare you threaten me?" and De Roberval laid his hand on his sword.

Charles imitated his action.

"Keep that plaything where it is. I have here at my side the sword I wore on the Sillon. Your weapon might shrink from its touch."

"Curse you!" hissed De Roberval; but remembering how girt about with foes was Charles, he checked himself, and with an evil smile said: "I forgot for a moment that you are my guest, with a petition to offer. Out with it! There is nothing I should not be willing to grant you."

"It is of Mdlle. de Roberval I have come to speak," said Charles, with a sternness which made the nobleman tremble lest his plans should miscarry. "Since I returned to France, two months ago, strange tales of your brutal treatment of your niece have reached my ears. I have come to you to find out the truth of these tales. If they are true, I will cut you off as a cursed thing among men. If you can prove them false, I swear I will defend your honour against every man who insults it by repeating them."

"I need no champion," said De Roberval testily. "I have done no wrong. Your friend, whom I trusted, whom I took into my house,

whom I saw nursed back to life in this very room, proved a faithless ingrate, and betrayed the trust I had placed in him."

"Liar!" came from between Charles' set teeth.

But De Roberval, unheeding the interruption, went on:

"To save my niece's honour I took her with me to the New World, and bade her lover venture not on board my vessel. But scarcely were we a day at sea when he stood by her side, having found his way on board among a gang of criminals. He disgraced the name of De Roberval before the whole world. I put him in chains for his disobedience; and still he seduced my niece to his side. Could I, as a just ruler, spare my own? I put her on an island in the northern seas, with the two jades who had abetted her crime; and her wretched paramour leaped into the ocean, and doubtless perished ere he reached the shore."

Charles stood pale and trembling with the effort to restrain himself, as he listened to this recital, and De Roberval exulted in the thought that in another moment he would see the man whom he now no longer dreaded lying dead at his feet. At last La Pommeraye found his tongue.

"Take back that lie!" he thundered, "or, by the holy cross, I will pluck the tongue that uttered it from your false throat! Claude a deceiver! Marguerite a——" but he could get no further. He was about to draw his sword, when he saw De Roberval's weapon flash upwards. The action recalled him to his senses. He remembered that this was to be the signal for the assassins. He reached out a sudden hand, seized De Roberval by the throat, and dashed him headlong against the wall. The shock stunned him for a moment, and his sword fell ringing on the floor. Charles picked it up, snapped it across his knee, and flung the pieces at the nobleman.

"A wretched weapon," said he, "fit for a coward."

De Roberval raised himself, and sat glaring at the wrathful giant.

"You are surprised," said La Pommeraye, "that I have not killed you. It is not mercy; I but respect the hospitality of your roof. I will let you

live for a time, tortured by your coward's conscience, and then I will strike you down. Assassin, your plot was discovered. You thought to have murdered me in your own house—you, who were once noble enough to strike at your own breast when you thought yourself defeated. Your peasants have more nobility. Etienne, whom you entrusted with the carrying out of your plan, told me the whole story, and I have sent him safely on his way on your best horse. Follow not his steps, or the Duke of Guise will make you feel his iron hand. You have still a few months to live. I passed the Isle of Demons, and saw your niece's watchfire beckoning me ashore. I return thither at once. If they are still alive I will come back and crave the King to mete out to you the punishment you deserve; if they have perished I will hack you limb from limb. Attempt not to follow me, or to send your dogs after me, or your days will suddenly be shortened."

Leaving the nobleman still half-stunned by the stinging blow he had received, and speechless at the threats he had listened to, especially at the mention of the Duke of Guise, Charles strode from the castle, mounted his horse, which awaited him at the gate, and rode away with a fury which put all chance of pursuit out of the question.

As he rode on with white face and set teeth, no one seeing him would have thought that the fierce eye and stern expression could have belonged to the dashing dare-devil, the prince of cavaliers and duellists, of a year before.

CHAPTER XVI

Autumn came once more to the lonely dwellers on the Isle of Demons.

The dreary time was settling down threateningly; and as they faced the inevitable months, their hearts sank within them.

The bleak, late September winds again compelled them to spend most of their time within their hut. Daily through the summer they had watched for a passing sail, but with the return of autumn they gave up hope, and made ready as best they could to pass another winter on their island prison. Their supply of food, although they had husbanded it with the utmost care, was almost exhausted, and they had now scarcely anything save fish and fowl.

Yet their wretched surroundings, their hopeless future, only drew them closer together. They had each other, and that meant everything. They could scarcely have been said to be actually unhappy, but for one ever-gnawing anxiety—the state of Claude's health. All summer he had remained strong and hopeful, but with the first cold weather his cough returned, and he himself realised that he could never live through the winter, whose icy breath they could even now feel from the north. He was to give up the fight sooner than either of them expected; but before the struggle ended still another sorrow—or joy, they scarce knew which—was to be added to their lives.

Early in October Marguerite's child was born. Almost she had prayed that it might not live; almost she had hoped that she might die with it, and end the awful suffering which was all they could look forward to. But when she came slowly back to strength again, and held the tiny, helpless creature in her arms, and knew that it drew its life from her veins, the desire to live returned to her; she had now a double incentive to courage and hope.

For a time Claude forgot the future, his own sufferings, everything except his son. All the tenderness in his nature showed itself now. His hands, which in France had known no service but war, were

now as apt as any woman's. Night and day he waited on Marguerite and her child, and with great joy saw them both grow strong. Meanwhile, a kind Providence seemed to be mindful of him, for his strength never failed him; and Marguerite, as each morning she met his bright smile and cheery words, began to hope that the miracle for which she had prayed had been worked, and that Claude would yet be spared to her.

The cold of September had been followed by an unusually late and mild autumn, and in the mellow, hazy days Marguerite would walk up and down the cliff with her child in her arms, followed by the cub, which they had humorously christened François, and which had now grown quite domesticated, and would shuffle after his mistress wherever she went, like a faithful dog. In these peaceful days Marguerite found herself crooning to her baby the old Normandy lullabies, which she had not heard since her own infancy, but which came back instinctively to her lips.

But her happiness was to be of short duration. The blow she had dreaded fell upon her when she least expected it. Claude's strength had been but false fire. With the return of the cold weather heaviness seized his limbs, a dull weight oppressed his lungs, and his cough grew rapidly worse. At last, one night, there came a hæmorrhage which would not be checked, and in the morning Marguerite found herself alone with her dead.

How she lived through that night and the days which followed it she never knew. Nature was merciful to her, and blotted out all memory of details from her brain. The constant necessity of caring for her child was all that saved her reason, and kept her from taking her life.

With her own hands she dug a third grave beside the two others on the cliff, and after incredible labour and exertion, she laid Claude's body to rest, and heaped the earth above it. When she had finished her task, which she had performed with wild and feverish energy, she threw herself upon the mound, and gave way to utter despair. How long she lay there she did not know; but she was recalled to herself by the crying of her child from the hut. Not for herself, but for the sake of the little life which depended upon her, she must continue to live and be strong. She pressed her baby to her breast,

and with amazing fortitude and heroism, set herself to face the task before her.

Then followed many weeks of agony. Through the long nights the wind howled about her hut, and she imagined she heard the voices of the demons of the island clamouring for her soul. With fiendish fury they yelled and shrieked round her frail little shelter, and often she fancied she could hear them trying to force an entrance. In the morning, with her child wrapped close and warm at her breast, she would go out and pace the cliff in all weathers, finding in the worst tumult of the elements a relief from the terrors of the night. Madness seemed settling down upon her, but the thought of her child bore her through it all, and the iron will of the De Robervals stood her in good stead.

Her vitality was marvellous. Something of the nature of her warrior ancestors seemed to have entered into her veins, and she was able to endure hardships such as had caused many a hardy soldier to succumb. The winter, which closed in upon her, bade fair to be no less severe than the preceding one, and now she had no one to help her in her daily tasks. With her own hands she had to break the bare branches, carry in fire-logs, and even cut down trees.

Her efforts to obtain fish were unsuccessful, although the ice, which occasionally formed about the shore, was soon broken up by the wind, and the birds, which still hovered about their island haunts, seemed to have no difficulty in procuring their food. Fortunately, the powder and shot, which they had carefully husbanded, still held out, and she had a sufficient supply to carry her through the winter. She was loth to destroy the only living creatures left upon the island. The hares, which leaped across her path, she had learned to love, and the warmly-clad northern birds had become very dear companions to her in her loneliness. But the terrible necessity that stared her in the face knew naught of mercy, and the winter stillness often re-echoed to the sound of her arquebuse. So expert had she become that she rarely wasted a charge of powder.

December passed, and January was nearly over, when the crowning sorrow which Fate had in store for this heroic woman fell upon her. She woke one morning to find her child cold and lifeless at her side.

She seized him in her arms, pressed the little icy form close to her warm breast, but felt no answering warmth. Madly she kissed his lips and eyes and cheeks; she would not believe that he was dead. When at length she became convinced of the truth, she rushed wildly from the hut.

There had been a heavy snowfall during the night. She was in her bare feet, but she heeded not the cold. She rushed to the cliff, her child in her arms, her hair streaming about her shoulders. The end had at last come; there was nothing further to live for. Fate had conquered. She could but throw herself into the sea, and, with her baby in her arms, confront the good God who had seen fit to pursue her with such suffering. But as she stood upon the cliff, the rolling waves beating against the rocky hollows in the grey dawn seemed to her the hoarse voices of the demons. Once more she heard them calling for her soul, and for the soul of her child. She turned, and retraced her steps to her empty hut.

Laying the baby's body on the bed, she sat down beside it on the floor, her hands clasped about her knees. Silent she sat there, beside the fire she had heaped up to try to revive the child, till night fell, and the stars shone out bright and clear in the frosty sky. Silent she sat till they faded again before the grey light of dawn, and the morning of a new day broke. The wind had risen during the night, and the waves had been bellowing up the beach; but she heard neither wind nor waves. Dry-eyed she sat beside her long-dead fire, and felt not cold nor fear. Her faculties were deadened, her brain numbed, and it was not till her faithful companion, François the bear, tired of waiting to be taken notice of, pressed his nose against her clasped hands, and breathed his warm breath into her face, that she awoke from her trance.

She rose mechanically, turned to her brush heap, selected some dry sticks for her fire, and was about to place them on the embers when she noticed that it had long been dead. Her hands were like ice; she was chilled to the very bone; but the physical pain she now began to feel saved her. It called forth her energies; quickly she went to work to renew the fire, and the exertion drew her out of herself. As the flames blazed up and crackled through the dry branches, the life

began to come back to her frozen limbs, and she roused herself to face her situation.

Her baby must be buried, and she must perform the task. She fashioned a rough coffin out of some planks, and tenderly laid the tiny body in it. As she fastened down the lid it seemed to her that every nail went through her own heart, but she did not weep. Her eyes had long since ceased to know the comfort of tears. Wearily she climbed the hillside with her little burden, wondering within herself how much longer it would be before she could lay her worn-out limbs beside those three rude graves, and be done with suffering for ever.

The baby must not lie alone; she would open Claude's grave, and lay him beside his father. The frozen ground was almost impenetrable, and it was long before she succeeded in digging a hole deep enough to admit the coffin. But patiently she toiled; slowly, with weak hands, hacking the soil, and scraping the lumps out of the grave. At last she had made a shallow opening which would hold the box, and when it was placed within she knelt beside it, holding the crucifix which had saved Claude from the waves, and prayed that their souls might rest in peace. A sudden impulse seized her. All that she had treasured, all that she had lived for, was in that grave. The crucifix was the last precious thing left to her, and she laid it upon the coffin of her child. Then, without trusting herself to kneel there longer, she rose hurriedly, cast back the frozen soil into the double grave, and piled large stones in a heap over the top, to prevent any animal scratching away the earth. Then she went back to her hut, and resumed the weary round of her hopeless, solitary life.

To a modern mind it may seem strange that reason did not utterly desert her; but the age in which she lived may help to account for the strength which sustained her. Though of noble blood, and tenderly nurtured, she had been accustomed to view scenes of death and hardship with a calm eye. Young as she was, she had beheld death in many forms; and the sieges which her uncle's castle had several times resisted had taught her something of a man's strength and endurance, which, coupled with a woman's tenacious vitality, made her doubly strong. Then, too, she had not been unfamiliar with

loneliness. In her youthful days, before Marie de Vignan had come to live with her, she had often been left alone for weeks, with no one to relieve the monotony of her existence save old Bastienne and the other servants; and during these periods she had rarely spoken to any human being, save to issue some command. And now, though she was absolutely alone, the struggle for existence, and the presence of the young bear, her sole living companion, saved her reason. Sometimes, however, the unwonted sound of her own voice made her start and wonder if she who had spoken could really be one with the desolate creature who trod this snow-clad island, hopelessly scanning the horizon for some sign that there was a world other than the narrow one within whose limits she was hemmed.

Night she dreaded. She kept her fire going through the long hours of darkness, but often the glowing embers and tongues of flame would take weird shapes before her eyes. Across the island the wind swept and moaned, and every sound seemed to her the voice of some of the fabled evil spirits of the north. Often she would wake from sleep feeling ghostly presences near her—at her very side. At such times she would creep close to her strange companion, François, and nestle against his shaggy coat. The warmth of his body, and the thick, soft rug which they had made from the skin of the old she-bear, were all that saved her from perishing of the bitter cold of that terrible winter.

It was with unutterable relief that she saw the spring sun return, and felt the warm south wind breathe upon the island hollows. Daily she had watched with hopeless eyes for the sail that never came; but now, as the green shoots began to glisten here and there on the brown sod, she once more built her watchfire high on the cliff, and kept it blazing night and day.

Winter seemed suddenly to have given place to summer. All through April the warm sun streamed down upon the island, and for hours she sat looking out over the blue stretch of scarcely moving water. But fickle spring had a change in store. A chill, icy breath swept down from the north; the pines and birches moaned and sighed once more; and the great green waves crashed foaming on the beach. Her heart sank within her; but ever southward she gazed. An inward

voice seemed still to assure her that help was on its way to her, and that her sufferings were nearly at an end.

At last, on the second day of the storm, her eye caught sight, on the broken horizon, of a sail. Steadily she watched it till there could no longer be any doubt of its reality; and then she heaped a huge pile of brushwood upon her fire. They had seen it! Nearer and nearer the vessel was drawing. At last she was to be rescued!

CHAPTER XVII

When Charles arrived at St Malo he found that his messenger, Etienne Brulé, had reached the town in safety, and that De Roberval's horse was being well looked after in Cartier's stables. No pursuit was attempted, and it became evident that Etienne's master would make no effort to bring him back.

In fact, De Roberval, who knew that La Pommeraye was the soul of honour, and that no one would believe him capable of a falsehood, felt that his own wisest course would be silence. He knew that at the least move on his part La Pommeraye would be able to turn all tongues against him; and if the young man had, as he had hinted, any influence with the Duke of Guise, he would undoubtedly call down upon him the heavy hand of the great minister, who had already no love for the ambitious little nobleman.

Charles, too, was kept silent by what he had learned. His old sunny smile had left him, and when he spoke, his once full, mellow voice had a hard, metallic ring. Cartier scarce recognised him, and his questions received but scant answers, which kept him from enquiring further.

"De Pontbriand may still live," said Charles. "Mdlle. de Roberval may still live, and I must restore them to France, or make sure that they are dead. If I find them not, God help De Roberval!"

"God help him in any case!" said Cartier to himself. "Your spirit will never rest till it has spilt the little tyrant's blood. But when," he added, "do you expect to start for the New World?"

"At once."

"Nay, that's impossible. You would have some difficulty in getting sailors to venture out on the Atlantic at this season."

"If I cannot get men to accompany me," said Charles, "Etienne and I will go alone;" and as he spoke, Etienne, who was standing by in Cartier's orchard, where the conversation took place, nodded assent, and muttered a determined "Ay, that we will!" He, too, was thinking

of his fair young mistress, who had always seemed to him like one of the blessed saints; and when he pictured her pining for her home through the dreary autumn and torturing winter in Canada, he would gladly have risked the voyage single-handed.

It was no easy matter to get a vessel. Roberval had returned, and Charles had no longer his former excuse. It was rumoured at court that the lovers had been punished for flaunting immorality; and to tell why he wanted the ship would be to drag the names of Claude and Marguerite through the mire. This he would not do. He would not even let himself think of what De Roberval had told him. It was not—it could not be true! It was true that he had awakened from his dream; he knew that he could never win Marguerite. What he had learned from Etienne and from her uncle had banished that wild hope; and all the little circumstances in their lives, which had before passed unnoticed, now rose before him to show him how blind and foolish he had been. But he loved her none the less—rather the more. And when he thought of what she and her lover must have endured on that desolate island, in the great northern ocean, his brain beat and his heart throbbed till he thought he must surely go mad. To save himself, he felt he must start on his journey as soon as possible.

But there were difficulties in the way. Cartier had disposed of his ships, and taken up his permanent residence at Limoilou. To purchase a new vessel would cost money; and Charles, ever prodigal, had but small means that he could call his own. On Cartier he depended for help; but that shrewd seaman knew how the enterprise must end, and instead of putting his hand into his money-bag, he did his utmost to dissuade La Pommeraye from his purpose.

Finding, however, that his friend had determined on the journey, he at length got several St Malo merchants to join with him in fitting out a small craft of fifty tons, ostensibly for the fur trade. The vessel was an old one, but had several times weathered the Atlantic, and a number of her old crew expressed themselves willing to join La Pommeraye if he would offer them a sufficient wage. He had hard work, however, in getting together six trusty fellows, who, with Etienne and himself, would undertake the winter journey. But by the beginning of December all was ready, and the little vessel, amid

shaking of heads and prophecies of misfortune from the knowing ones, steered away for the Channel, and out towards the Atlantic, where even then a storm was raging.

But they were to meet with disappointment at the very beginning of their voyage. The masts creaked and groaned; the planks quivered; the oakum became loose in the seams; and on the second day out it was found that the vessel had sprung a leak. Pump as they would, they could not lessen the water in the hold; and though La Pommeraye would fain have held on his way, discretion compelled him to turn his vessel's head about, and run for the port he had just left.

When he reached harbour, the deck of the ship was almost to the water's edge. There was nothing to do but to run her ashore. When the water was pumped out of her, it was found that she was in a badly strained condition, and that several planks in her hull were completely worm-eaten. She had to be drawn up high and dry, and carpenters set to work to give her a thorough overhauling. By the time she was again ready for sea, the January snows had begun to whiten the fields about St Malo. Nothing daunted, La Pommeraye determined to venture again, and Etienne stood by him; but when they came to look for their crew, they found that the fellows had all fled St Malo, and could not be found. No other men were willing to take their places; and through the winter, La Pommeraye, like one distraught, went up and down the streets seeking seamen. But none would join his expedition. The inhabitants of the town came to look upon him as mad, and wondered what evil influence there could be in the New World dragging him to it. Even the merchants regretted the money put into the venture; but Cartier would not let them withdraw.

It was not until spring that the *Marie*, for so the little craft was called, was ready for sea, fully manned once more. Just when the March showers were beginning to rejuvenate the earth she drew away from the town; and Cartier, who stood on the wall watching her go forth, wondered what the end would be. It could only be tragic. No company could live through two dreary winters on a lonely island without losing some of their number, and he doubted not that all

were dead. He half regretted, as he watched his friend's sail drop down beneath the horizon, that he had not gone with him. But the three disappointments the New World had already given him made him dread its shores, and he shuddered as he thought of the gruesome tidings which must await La Pommeraye on that lonely northern isle. He shuddered, too, as he thought of De Roberval. Fate is sometimes slow-footed, but he felt certain that it must at last rush with unerring speed to the destruction of the man who had wrecked so many lives.

La Pommeraye kept on every stitch of canvas his little ship would carry, and after four weeks' sailing, before a favouring breeze, the southern coast of Newfoundland was reached. So far, they had had no trying weather, and their hearts beat high with hope that their journey would end without mishap. They ran into the harbour of St John, replenished their almost empty water-casks, and then started on their final trip towards the Isle of Demons.

But April is a treacherous month. It had been up to this time summer-like, with a hot sun and gentle southern breezes. Now the wind shifted to the north; the clouds crept across the sky leaden and low; a heavy snowfall descended upon them; and it seemed that winter was returning. Charles was only the more anxious to reach the island, and crowded on canvas. But the bending masts and crashing seas finally made him reef his sails, and his little ship for several days beat her difficult way northward. La Pommeraye himself spent most of his time in the crosstrees, keeping an anxious lookout for his destination. It seemed to him that he would never reach it; and the storm, which had increased instead of diminishing as the days went on, threatened to swamp his vessel. The sailing-master besought him to turn about and run for the harbour of St John. He saw that he would be compelled to do so; but before giving the command, he once more went aloft and scanned the broken, misty horizon. His keen eye soon discerned a dark spot, which appeared and disappeared as the *Marie* rose and fell on the waves. Nearer it drew, and to his unutterable joy he saw a pillar of smoke rise from it, and, growing in volume, spread in a mighty cloud over the waters.

"It is they! They live!" shouted La Pommeraye, and sliding down a backstay, seized his sailing-master's arm, and pointed to the hopeful signal.

The sailors saw it, too. They knew the island, and crossed themselves fearfully as they gazed upon what they believed to be the smoke of the pit. To all except Etienne and La Pommeraye it seemed as if they were rushing recklessly upon destruction. As if to buttress their fears, the stormy north-east wind blew with redoubled fury, and wave after wave swept over the ship, threatening to crush in their decks. The island was now within a mile of them, and the pillar of smoke still rose, beckoning them onward. But La Pommeraye's hopes were to be dashed to the ground. A wave mightier than its fellows broke against the high bows, and catching the *Marie* amidships, sent tons of water on her decks. Before she could recover and throw it off, a succession of similar waves rolled in upon her, and all seemed lost.

"Our only hope," cried the sailing-master, "is to 'bout ship, and run before the wind. No vessel could anchor in this storm, even if we did reach yon island; and unless the gale lessens, we must sooner or later be swamped."

There was nothing else for it, and La Pommeraye unwillingly consented. The little craft was with difficulty brought about. Every scrap of canvas was lowered, and she went scudding along under bare poles, with the huge seas climbing high about her lofty poop, seeking to drown her.

When Marguerite saw the vessel which had been bearing down upon her begin to recede, her heart failed her altogether. They had seen her signal, and yet they were deserting her. For months she had watched in vain; at last her hope seemed about to be realised; and when she saw it vanish she was left more desolate than ever. Gladly at that moment would she have welcomed death; and indeed it could not long delay now. Her ammunition was exhausted; she was living principally on the eggs of the shore birds and the fish which she was once more able to procure occasionally. But such precarious means could not last long; it was only a question of time.

She sat on the cliff, unheeding the storm which beat about her head and scattered the embers of her fire. The anguish of her position forced itself upon her. To be left on the island meant a slow and torturing death; and yet, had she been rescued, she must have left behind her all that she had loved. She prayed that she might die at once.

But Heaven had ordered otherwise. Life and hope were to return to her; her imprisonment was nearly over.

La Pommeraye's vessel drove before the gale until the high cliffs of St John's harbour loomed up before her. They were a welcome sight, for the little craft had been so strained by the struggle against the storm, that she had sprung a leak, and it was with difficulty that the sailors kept the water in the hold from gaining on them. But within the harbour the waters were comparatively calm; and when the anchor was cast, a careful examination showed that the leak was immediately above the water-line, and could be easily remedied. All through the night the wind howled through the rigging; and all through the night La Pommeraye, unable to rest, paced the deck like a caged tiger. On the following morning the storm still raged, and it was not till the next day that they were able to make for the open sea. The wind had now shifted to the south, and a gentle breeze was rippling the surface of the giant rollers over which they plunged on their northward way.

Four days had elapsed since Marguerite had seen the vessel disappear; and four terrible days she had spent, roaming like one demented over her island prison. All day she heard the voices of the demons calling from every cliff and cave, and at night they beat upon the walls of her cabin, and seemed to keep up a fierce, demoniacal laughter over the graves on the hillside. Had it not been for François, she would have rushed into the great green waves which rolled up on the shore, bent on her own destruction; but the presence of the faithful creature, who followed her about from cliff to cliff, as she looked east and west, north and south, over the waste of waters; who sat by with pathetic wonder as she lay stretched at length upon her loved ones' graves; who guarded her through the darkness while the demons were howling above her abode—saved

her from herself. She longed for death; she would have shrunk from the thought of leaving the island where Claude lay, but the principle of life which would not die demanded that she should save herself if it were possible. And while she prayed for death to come, she strained her eyes in the hope of seeing some approaching sail.

At last the storm abated. The waves still climbed the island reaches, but the warm breeze told her that the time of danger was past. A hope which would not be crushed out whispered to her that the vessel she had seen had been on its way to the island, and as the storm went down, the same wild hope suggested to her that it would come back. Till darkness fell she gazed, and when day broke she stood on the "lookout," scanning the far horizon. At last she was rewarded. A dim, white speck stood out against the clear sky. Swiftly it approached. Gradually the white sails showed distinct, then the black hull appeared, and there, before her, lay a vessel of her own land—a vessel from La Belle France. She moved not, nor spoke, and by her side sat François on his haunches, as motionless as herself. A cannon boomed from the ship, and its echoes awoke a myriad birds, which flew screaming across the waves, or plunged into the ocean. It was a strange sound to Marguerite—a voice from her old home, calling her back to life.

With joy La Pommeraye had sighted once more the rocky point of land upon the horizon. But a keen pang of disappointment seized him when he looked in vain for the signal which had told him there was yet life on the island. Could they have perished in the storm? Could his approach, when they were on the verge of the grave, have served only to tantalise them, and make the end the harder? Such thoughts beat in his brain, as he vainly watched for any sign of life.

At last Etienne touched his arm.

"Look, Monsieur, they live! There stand two figures on yonder cliff."

As he spoke, all eyes turned towards the projecting spur, and as the keen-visioned sailors caught sight of Marguerite and her uncouth companion, they fell on their knees and crossed themselves in holy awe. La Pommeraye quickly had the sails run down and the anchor

dropped; and before Marguerite could leave her station, the gun boomed forth its welcome.

Down to the beach she went to meet the approaching boat, and even La Pommeraye was awed when he saw her figure coming towards him.

Her clothes had been patched and mended till it was impossible to mend them any longer, and they now hung in tatters about her. Her hair, once so black and glossy, was streaked with white, and her face wore the look of one who has known all that life has to give of joy and of sorrow, and who has walked in the presence of death as with a friend. By her side shambled the young bear, a shaggy, ferocious-looking monster, enough of itself to strike terror to the hearts of the amazed sailors. The men in the boat lost their courage, and their nerveless hands refused to grasp the oars. But the stern, commanding voice of La Pommeraye restored their presence of mind. The boat's keel grated on the rocks, and La Pommeraye leaped ashore and fell on his knees before the pale ghost of the woman he had loved so faithfully, and followed through half the world.

"Mademoiselle!" he said, but he could get no further. His heart had risen in his throat, and was choking him. She, too, stood like one stunned, her knees trembling, her brain swimming. She would have fallen, but that she took his extended hand to support herself.

The bear had been growling uneasily at her side, and when he saw La Pommeraye's hand touch his mistress, he gave a savage growl, and was about to spring upon the intruder. Marguerite bade him down, and the obedient creature crouched at her feet.

"Mademoiselle has a strange guardian," said La Pommeraye, who had risen at the animal's approach.

"He has kept me alive, Monsieur. But for him I should have gone mad, or cast myself into the sea."

"Where are your companions?"

La Pommeraye shuddered as he asked the question, but he could keep it back no longer.

"It is well with them," she answered calmly; "they sleep behind yonder hill."

"Dead?" exclaimed La Pommeraye, beneath his breath.

"All dead," was her quiet reply.

"And yet you live! How long have you endured the loneliness of this dreary spot?"

"Claude died before the snows fell, and since then François and I have lived I know not how. I have tried to die, but Heaven has been too kind."

La Pommeraye turned away his head, and the sobs he could no longer restrain shook him from head to foot. He struggled for self-control. At last he turned to her, and took her hand to lead her to the boat.

"Your old servant, Etienne Brulé, is with me," he said. "He waits in the boat for you. He will look after you while I collect whatever may be in your hut."

But she drew back a little from him.

"Monsieur, I cannot——" and for the first time her voice faltered. "I cannot leave my dead!"

Even at that moment Charles was conscious of a fierce throb at his heart, as he realised that the woman he loved had irrevocably, for life and for death, given her life to his friend.

As she spoke she turned, and led him past the hut, and up the hill to the little group of graves. The hour of utter separation had come, and she could say nothing. La Pommeraye felt that a word from him would be sacrilege. Silent she stood there, torn between the fearful pang of parting, and the realisation that she must go. At last her will conquered, and she turned to La Pommeraye, saying simply: "I am ready, Monsieur."

Of the fourth who slept in that lonely hillside cemetery she said not a word. The young life had come into being, and had passed away

again, there, in this desert spot, amidst the trackless wastes of ocean, unknown to any save the two whose souls it had for ever linked indissolubly. Why should the world be told? The island would keep her secret; and no one in France should ever learn that her child and Claude's lay at rest in his father's grave.

She kneeled and kissed the stones which marked the spot; and then, without one backward look, she followed La Pommeraye to the hut.

There was little to take with her—the bearskin rug which had been her salvation through the bitter winter, and one or two precious personal trifles which were all that were left of her dead. La Pommeraye's heart was bursting within him as he saw how she had lived, and guessed what she must have endured. In silence they went down to the shore.

"Poor François!" Marguerite said, throwing her arms about the neck of the faithful beast. "Poor François!" and there was a world of meaning in her tone.

Soon they were ready to leave the island; and the wondering sailors, who knew nothing of her story—for Etienne had kept a sacred silence—shuddered as she stepped into the boat.

When the bear saw his mistress deserting him he leaped into the water, and tried to swim after her. Becoming wearied with the effort, however, he was obliged to give it up and swim back to the shore, where he paced up and down the beach with his rolling, awkward gait, his eyes fixed on the retreating boat.

As the ship sailed away, the sailors could see his white form standing in melancholy solitude on the highest point of the cliff. When the vessel was but a speck in the distance, he turned his eyes shoreward, and saw a seal basking in the sun. Stealthily he crept down the cliff and along the shore, his huge claws sank into the neck of the unsuspecting beast, and with savage delight he tore it in pieces.

CHAPTER XVIII

As the vessel sailed away from the Isle of Demons, La Pommeraye had but one thought—to get back to France at once and confront De Roberval. But before he had sailed many miles he remembered that he had a duty to perform to the merchants of St Malo who had fitted out his little ship. The course was changed, the vessel's bow turned westward, and after a few days' sail he cast anchor in the black waters at the mouth of the great gorge of the Saguenay. He was welcomed by the Indians, whose huts clustered about the high cliffs and along the sandy stretches of that rugged spot. Runners were sent out to the surrounding Indian villages, and in a few days his vessel was almost sunk to the decks with a rich cargo of furs.

All this time Marguerite kept out of sight, only coming on deck in the evenings when it was dark, and she could be alone. She shunned companionship, and scarcely spoke, even to La Pommeraye. A deep and settled melancholy brooded over her soul. When her little island sank from sight on the horizon, it seemed to her that all she loved on earth was lost to her for ever. Night and day she saw before her eyes that lonely grave on the hillside where her heart lay buried; and at times the longing to return to it grew too strong for her, and she was tempted to beg La Pommeraye to take her back. But the kindly French faces about her, the French voices which sounded like music in her ears, the generous, thoughtful consideration of Claude's old comrade, restored her to her right mind. Quiet, good food, comparative comfort, and sleep wrought a marvellous change in her, and by the time they were on their way towards France, she was able to talk a little, and to give Charles an outline of her story.

Six weeks after this the merchants of St Malo saw a deeply-laden craft sweeping into the harbour under a cloud of canvas. She was no fisherman; and many who had money invested in sea ventures flocked to the walls. Among the rest stood the keen-sighted Cartier, who never heard of the approach of a vessel from foreign shores but he thought of La Pommeraye. Scarcely had he caught sight of the ship when he exclaimed:

"It is the *Marie*, and loaded to the decks!" And to himself he added: "Back so soon? His work must be finished; and now, God have mercy on De Roberval!"

When the ship cast anchor, Cartier was one of the first to reach her, and, hurrying on board, he warmly embraced his friend. Then he placed him at arm's length, and, with his hand upon his shoulder, eagerly scanned his countenance, as if to learn from it what tidings he had brought. La Pommeraye did not speak, but his face told Cartier that all was not well.

"You have been at the Isle of Demons?" he asked at last.

"I have."

"And found there?—De Pontbriand—is he still alive?"

Charles controlled himself with an effort to answer:

"Think you, if Claude de Pontbriand were on board, he would stay below while Jacques Cartier boarded his vessel?"

"He is dead?"

"Dead!"

"And Mdlle. de Roberval?"

"She alone, of all the party, is left alive. She lived on in that bleak spot in the midst of the Atlantic, while her nurse and her companion perished, and at last, with her own hands, she buried Claude. One other death must follow to complete the tragedy."

Cartier wrung his friend's hand in silence. He was no longer young; but something of the fierce rage which burned in La Pommeraye's breast burst into flame in his own, as he looked at the worn and saddened face of the once buoyant young adventurer. "God help De Roberval!" he once more thought, "and God speed the arm that strikes the blow!"

"But come below," said Charles, after a few moments' oppressive silence, "and see Mdlle. de Roberval for yourself. I wish no one but

you to know for the present that she has returned to France. I will leave you with her, and attend to these Malouins, who have, no doubt, come to see what return I can give them for the sous they invested in the *Marie*."

Cartier could not restrain a start of dismay when he was ushered into the little cabin, where Marguerite sat awaiting him. He had last seen her, little more than four years before, a beautiful girl, in the full, radiant charm of budding womanhood. She stood before him now, worn and aged, with white hair and the face of a woman of fifty instead of a girl of twenty-six. But her figure was as upright as ever, and her carriage as queenly; her dark eyes had lost none of their fire—though their depths held the secret of her life's tragedy—and her voice, when she spoke, had gained in fulness and richness what it had lost in girlish brightness and gaiety.

Cartier controlled himself, and allowed no sign of pity or sympathy to appear in his face or voice.

"Mademoiselle," he said simply, "I welcome you back to France. If you will deign to accept my hospitality, my house and all that I have are at your service for as long as you will make use of them."

Marguerite thanked him with her old, quiet dignity. She never lost her self-control through all the trying scenes of her return to the land she had left under such different auspices—so little dreaming what her home-coming would be. When Charles had succeeded in getting rid of the merchants who crowded his decks, he conducted her on shore. Cartier, moved with fatherly compassion towards the young girl whose sufferings seemed more like legend than reality, insisted that she should stay with him and his family till a meeting with De Roberval could be arranged.

A messenger was despatched to Picardy, but returned with the information that De Roberval had long been absent from his castle. He was busy in the wars; but as Paris would doubtless be his head-quarters, Charles and Marguerite determined to seek him there.

All this time no word of love had crossed La Pommeraye's lips. He yearned with unutterable longing to claim as his own the right to

cherish and protect Marguerite for the rest of her life, but daily he realised how deep was the gulf which separated them. Her heart, he knew, could only be won across Claude's grave, and each time that he tried to speak, the vision of the desolate cemetery on the island rose before him, and the words froze on his lips. Marguerite could not help seeing his devotion; but she so carefully avoided giving him any sign of encouragement that the weeks at the manor-house of Limoilou, and the subsequent journey to Paris, were both passed without La Pommeraye's being able to get any nearer to her. Ungrateful she could not be. She felt for the fair giant a tender, sisterly affection, and learned to understand how Claude and Marie had both had for him such an unbounded admiration.

At Paris Charles established her in a secluded quarter—for although she had friends in the city, both deemed it wise that for the present, absolutely no one should know of her return. All deemed her dead; and for a time she must still be dead to the world. La Pommeraye was careful to avoid his old haunts and friends, but in no way relaxed his quest of information about De Roberval's movements. He learned that the nobleman was not then in the city, but that within a week he would return.

With this news he hastened to Marguerite. She was deeply moved on learning that she was so soon to be confronted with her uncle. How should she meet him? What would he have to say to her, whom he doubtless believed long dead?

Her life had become a strange chaos. She hardly knew why she had allowed herself to be brought to Paris. It would be impossible ever to resume the old relations with her uncle; but to live much longer dependent upon strangers was out of the question. Some arrangements for her future must be made without delay, but in any case De Roberval must be informed of her presence. Feeling of any kind seemed almost dead within her, but remembering the circumstances of their parting, she could not look forward to meeting her uncle again without a tremor of anticipation.

She noted the fire in La Pommeraye's eye, as he walked up and down her apartment, after giving her the information; and a day or

two afterwards when he came to consult her about some business matters, she asked him what his plans were.

"I shall seek out Sieur de Roberval," said Charles, "as soon as he arrives, and arrange a meeting between you in whatever way you may direct me. And then——"

He checked himself abruptly; but Marguerite saw the flash of his eye, and the resolute expression his mouth assumed as he kept back the words which had been on his lips. She laid her hand gently on his arm.

"M. de la Pommeraye," she said, "you have proved yourself a true and devoted friend to me. I know that I can never hope to repay your unselfish sacrifices; nor can I ever express even a small part of my gratitude for all that you have so nobly done. Nay, listen to me——" as Charles was about to interrupt her. "I feel more deeply than I can tell you; you must let me speak this once. I am not ungrateful, believe me." Her voice trembled a little, though she controlled it instantly. "But I am about to ask one more kindness at your hands. There has been enough blood shed—too much. Unhappy woman that I am, how shall I render an account of all the deaths of which I have been the cause?" She turned away for a moment; and the rare sobs shook her slight figure. Charles was awed into silence before a sorrow too deep for any words. At last she turned to him, and with an imploring gesture said: "I beg of you to spare my uncle's life."

La Pommeraye began his habitual stride up and down the room. His brow was dark, and he gnawed his underlip savagely. That she should plead for the life of the man who had brought all this upon her was to him inexplicable. Was he then to be baulked of his revenge?

Marguerite stood awaiting his answer.

"Monsieur," she said at last, "will you add one more to my sorrows?"

The unutterable sadness of the tone went to La Pommeraye's heart. Impulsively he knelt before her.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "if an angel from heaven had appeared to me and asked me to have mercy on that villain, I should have perilled my own soul rather than let him go unpunished. But now——"

His voice failed him. He took her hand and gazed into her face. All his soul was in his eyes; and in that yearning look Marguerite read his secret. He was about to speak, but she stopped him.

"Rise," she said gently, "you are too noble to kneel to me. You are my best friend—the only friend I have in the world. Remember, I am entirely alone. I trust you, Monsieur; I place myself absolutely in your hands. Will you grant my request?"

She had chosen her words well. Charles saw that she had understood him, and had wished to prevent his speaking of his love. The gentle reminder of her helpless dependence on him called forth all his manhood and chivalry, and silenced the passionate avowal he had been about to make. He pressed her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"Your wish is my law, Mademoiselle," he said, and, controlling himself with an effort, he bade her adieu and hastened from the house.

Out in the streets of the city he walked, he cared not whither. Passers-by turned to look at him; but he heeded no one. He strode on, absorbed in his own inward struggle, till he drew near the Church of the Innocents, in the heart of the city. A party of nobles were approaching, and as they passed him, a burst of laughter from among them attracted his attention. He raised his eyes; saw De Roberval, and his sword leaped from its scabbard. Half-a-dozen other weapons instantly flashed in the sunlight; but La Pommeraye, recollecting that he had no quarrel with any save one of their number, sheathed his blade, and unheeding the shouts of welcome from some of the party who recognised him, beckoned De Roberval aside from the group.

"My presence here alarms you," he said, for the nobleman's sudden pallor had not escaped his notice. "And with good reason. I have but just returned from the Isle of Demons."

"Indeed; and what concern of mine is that?" returned De Roberval, with an assumption of carelessness, though he could not altogether steady his voice.

Charles looked him straight in the face.

"Coward and murderer!" he said between his teeth.

"They are dead then?" said De Roberval, still striving to speak calmly.

"Dead!"

De Roberval had taken a quick resolve. Mastering himself with a great effort, he said hurriedly: "We cannot speak of it now. Meet me to-night at this spot, and the darkest tale you have to tell I will listen to. If you desire my life, I am weary of it, and would gladly lay it down."

The man had aged greatly since Charles last saw him. His shoulders were bent; his hair was almost white; and his face was thin and worn. Something in his voice made Charles believe that he was sincere, and for a moment a feeling almost akin to pity stirred in his heart.

"It is well," said he. "To-night, at eight o'clock, I will be here," and without so much as a word to the nobleman's companions, he strode away. He returned to Marguerite, and told her of the encounter with her uncle, and the meeting which had been arranged for the evening. The news evidently agitated her greatly.

"Have you told him of my presence here?" she asked. "Does he expect me to meet him?"

"He knows naught of your return," answered La Pommeraye. "I had no opportunity to tell him. He thinks you perished on the island."

"But you will tell him to-night?"

"I have been thinking of a plan," said Charles. "Would it not be well for you to wait within the Church of the Innocents, where I am to meet him, while I warn him of your return, and prepare him to meet you?"

Marguerite grasped at the idea. She dreaded, above all things, another quarrel between La Pommeraye and her uncle; and her presence would be a safeguard against bloodshed. As she prepared to accompany Charles, her thoughts went back to that other evening—nearly five years before—when she had been present at an encounter between these same two men. The object she now had in view was the same—to save her uncle's life; but the circumstances—how different! Could the veil have been lifted from the future on that first meeting, would she not have been tempted to leave him to the mercy of his enemy's sword? And now she was accompanying that enemy—who had proved himself her friend when she had no other in all the world—to keep him from avenging her wrongs upon the man who should have been her natural protector. Her brain swam as these thoughts crowded upon her; and she was glad to take refuge in the dimly-lighted church, and to quiet her distracted spirit in silent prayer before the altar.

La Pommeraye, outside, paced up and down, awaiting De Roberval's arrival. His hand was on his sword-hilt, and his watchful eye kept a sharp look-out on all sides; for in spite of the nobleman's parting words to him in the afternoon, he had already had but too good reason to suspect him of treachery.

And in fact, De Roberval had resolved within himself to add yet one more brutal deed to the long list which had ruined his life, and changed him from a gentleman and a man of honour to a bully, a coward, and an assassin. La Pommeraye had returned to France. He had but to open his lips, and De Roberval's life was at his mercy. Nor could the nobleman recover from the stinging indignity and humiliation which Charles had put upon him at their last meeting. From first to last, he had owed him a bitter grudge—all the more bitter, because, in a moment of cowardice, he had taken advantage of the noble fellow's generosity to shield himself from defeat and dishonour. No, there was no alternative; La Pommeraye must die;

and with that death all evidence of his crimes would be removed. He had no fear from the men who had accompanied Charles to America; he had made inquiries, and learned that they were none but fishermen and sailors; and any version of the story they might have brought back would be too garbled and exaggerated to be believed.

But he feared La Pommeraye's sword, and under his doublet he put on a shirt of mail. Seeking the quarters of a reckless cut-throat, who would have assassinated his own father for a few sous, he gave him a purse of gold, and letting him know the nature of the work before him, bade him strike sure and sharp, as soon as La Pommeraye was engaged in conversation; and instead of a purse, he would fill his cap with gold.

At the appointed hour he went to the rendezvous, where La Pommeraye was impatiently awaiting him.

The nobleman's demeanour had entirely changed since he left Charles in the afternoon. He now assumed the dignity of a man who has been unjustly suspected, and is prepared to avenge an insult.

"So, Monsieur," he said, as Charles approached him, "you are still determined to harrow up the past, and to compel me to acknowledge once more the dishonour which has befallen my name."

"I am here," said Charles, his hot blood all aflame in an instant at the implied slur on Marguerite, "to call you to account for the death of Claude de Pontbriand, and for the foul wrong you did your innocent niece."

As he spoke he rested his hand on his sword. De Roberval saw the action, thought he meant to draw it, and his own weapon flashed from its sheath. At this moment Marguerite appeared at the door of the church. She saw her uncle draw his sword, and thinking they were about to fight, rushed down the steps just as De Roberval made a pass at La Pommeraye, who, adroitly stepping aside, escaped being wounded, and drawing his own sword, stood on the defensive. As he did so, he heard a step behind him. A sudden instinct warned him; leaping back, he barely escaped a treacherous thrust from

behind. At the same instant, De Roberval caught sight of his niece's pale face in the uncertain light; and, striking wildly at La Pommeraye, fell forward at the latter's feet.

Charles heeded him not. His blood was roused, and turning on the would-be assassin, who was about to flee in terror, he ran him through the heart.

Then seeing that De Roberval made no attempt to rise, he stooped and turned him on his side, and saw that his hand clung in a death-grip to his sword-hilt, while the point of the weapon had pierced his brain. It was Bayard's sword; the sword the king had given him in the hour of his ambition. In his terror at the sudden apparition of what he believed to be his niece's spirit, his foot had slipped, and the stroke he had intended for La Pommeraye had ended his own life.

CHAPTER XIX

Next day all Paris knew the details of De Roberval's death. He had been set upon by an assassin, had struck his would-be murderer down, and slipping in the blood of his victim, had fallen on his own sword, thus ending the brightest career in France. So ran the report; and there was no one to contradict it.

La Pommeraye, when he had ascertained that Roberval was indeed dead, had had but one thought—to get Marguerite away from the spot before the crowd which, attracted by the scuffle, had already begun to gather, should become aware of her presence. He hastily drew her back into the church; hurried her by a side exit into another street; and so conveyed her, half-fainting, to her home. When she was able to listen she learned the truth from his own lips. Her mind went back over the terrible scene through which she had passed; she saw her uncle lying side by side in death with a paid cut-throat; and suddenly there flashed across her brain the words which Claude had uttered as he stood on the deck of *L'Heureux*, the noose about his neck: "May you perish miserably by your own murderous hand."

Paris went into mourning. The court, the Church, the city, all laid aside their usual occupations to do honour to the remains of him who had upheld in two worlds the glory of France, who had been a devout son of the Church, and who had ever kept the name of his monarch as a talisman against his foes. His body, after lying in state for three days, was buried with all the pomp and ceremonial due to his rank and fame; and the real truth concerning his death remained a secret in the hearts of the two he had so cruelly wronged.

Marguerite's return to France could not be for ever kept unknown; and, indeed, since her uncle's death, there was no further need for concealment. Her story—or as much of it as she chose to make public—soon began to spread abroad. Many and garbled were the versions of it which were circulated at the court and in the city. But to most of those who looked upon that noble and beautiful face, with its traces of bitter suffering, suspicion of evil was impossible. The friends who had known and loved her before her departure would gladly have welcomed her back; but she shunned all society. Never

again could she mingle in the world of Paris. She accepted the invitation of an old and dearly-loved companion, and went to stay at a villa on the banks of the Seine.

Here, after a time, La Pommeraye ventured to visit her. As the weeks went by, the beautiful air of her native land, the constant companionship of friends, the return of health and strength, had begun to restore to her something of her lost youth; though the old vivacity was for ever gone. She welcomed La Pommeraye with more cheerfulness and freedom than he had dared to expect; and gradually he began to think that distance from the scene of her sorrows, and the removal of her uncle—the cause of all her suffering—were making her feel the past less keenly. In spite of his conviction that she would never love him, he almost began to hope. The old yearning pain which had never died stirred at his heart more uncontrollably than ever. He struggled manfully to show no signs of it, fearing lest he should lose even the joy of seeing her, but daily he threw himself in Marguerite's way, and daily he could not but feel that he was growing more necessary to her.

And, indeed, to the lonely and saddened woman, his companionship was an unspeakable comfort. The steadfast, broad-shouldered, handsome giant had saved her from untold horrors, he had proved his devotion to her at a cost which might well have appalled the bravest. She knew that whatever might happen to her, his strong arm was ready to shield her from evil for the rest of her life. Alone in the world as she was, she clung to him as her best and truest friend; she loved him indeed, with all the strength that was left her, though not in the way for which he longed. Her woman's eye saw through the restraint he put upon himself; she knew that his heart was unalterably hers, and that, sooner or later, some day he would speak. She dreaded the inevitable parting, and sought to defer it by every means in her power.

It came sooner than she expected. A period of comparative peace had given La Pommeraye's sword an unwonted rest, but hostilities were once more commenced, and he could not remain idle. His post was on the field, but he was unable to go till he had learned from

Marguerite's own lips whether life still held a chance of happiness for him.

He was in Paris when the news came. After a few hurried preparations he left the city and hastened to her side. His heart beat wildly as he paced with her in the moonlight up and down the terrace overlooking the river. It was early spring—just a year since her rescue from the island. Thronging memories surged in her heart, and kept her from noticing the silence of her companion, till at last he spoke.

"Marguerite," he said, for he now called her by her name, at her own request, "I have to leave Paris to-morrow. There is hot work awaiting my sword in the south, and I must delay no longer."

She turned to him in sudden alarm; the news was quite unexpected.

"My friend—my brother," she said impulsively, "do not leave me! Not yet, not yet!"

The moment had come. The love pent up in La Pommeraye's heart would be restrained no longer, and burst from him in a torrent of passionate words. She could not stop him now; it was too late. She stood pale and silent as he poured forth all the love and longing of those weary years. Her heart was moved with a great compassion for him; but when, encouraged by her silence, he touched her hand, she drew it suddenly from him. Before her rose the dead face of him who had been as truly her husband as if a priest had blessed their marriage; she felt once more the touch of her child's lips at her breast; she saw again that double grave on the lonely hillside so many thousand miles away. She had loved once, and her heart was dead and buried in that far-off grave. Life held no second love for her, henceforth there was nothing left her but the memory of that which once had been. But her friend, her only support and comfort, must she lose him too? Heaven was cruel indeed to her. She covered her face with her hands.

"God help me!" she said shudderingly. "It cannot be."

He thought she was relenting. In an instant he had taken her hands in his, while he pleaded passionately for time, for hope; no promise,

only permission to spend his life in her service, only a word to carry with him on his journey. But she had regained her self-control, and spoke now with a quiet, sad decision that was as a death-knell to his heart.

"My friend," she said, "I would have saved you this if I could. I have tried to spare you, and"—her voice trembled—"to spare myself. Hush," as he was about to interrupt, "it is because I do love you—though not in the way you wish—that I would have spared us both this parting. You are all I have left in the world—if I lose you, I am indeed alone."

She stopped a moment. There were no tears in the wide, dark eyes as she looked straight before her, over the gleaming river, but her face was white as death in the moonlight, and the lines about her mouth told of the hidden depths of feeling beneath that quiet exterior. Charles had sprung to his feet, an impetuous outburst on his lips, but she silenced him with uplifted hand.

"Come," she said, "let us continue our walk, and I will tell you what I have thought I should tell to no living being on earth."

And there, with tearless eyes and in a voice that never faltered, she told him the whole story of those three years on the island, omitting nothing, giving the outlines clearly and briefly, but with a vividness which burned the details on Charles' throbbing brain as if they had been branded with a hot iron.

"And now," she said, as she finished and turned to him, lifting her calm eyes to his pale and hopeless face, "now you will see why it is impossible that I should give you what you ask. My life was Claude's; I gave myself utterly to him. He suffered with me, he died for me; I have nothing left but his memory, but to that I shall be true till I die. My friend, do you understand *now*?"

He was on his knees before her. She gave him her hands unresistingly, and he laid his hot forehead against them for an instant. Then he looked up at her, and she saw that indeed he understood.

Her face, as she met his look, was full of an infinite tenderness and pity. Laying her hand gently on his head, she stooped and kissed him once upon the brow. The whole manner of the action was so austere, so full of the sadness and remoteness of one whom a vast, impassable gulf separates for ever from all human and familiar intercourse, that it told Charles more plainly than any words could have done, the hopelessness of his love. He bowed his head in silence a moment, then pressing his lips passionately to her hand, he rose and left her.

She never saw him again. When she realised that he was indeed gone, that the last link which bound her to her past was broken, she began to feel bitterly the utter loneliness of her lot. Alone in the world, without kith or kin; alone, without the possibility of ever unburdening her heart to any human being, the old madness which had stared her in the face on the Isle of Demons seemed about to return.

But she was to have a noble salvation. Her uncle's estates were now hers. The wars had left them poor, untilled, in a wretched condition. The peasants were starving, the ramparts of the castle were tumbling down, and robber bands were plundering what remained to her. A life of action was what she needed: her resolve was soon taken, and in less than a month she was on her way northward, taking with her a companion of her own rank who had consented to share her solitude.

The journey was a weary one. Repeatedly she would have turned back, but her determined will urged her on. She was the last De Roberval; the noble name was a sacred trust to her, and she would keep it noble to the end. When she reached her castle, the peasants who remembered her, and had thought her dead, flocked about her, weeping and laughing, kissing her horse and her garments, until, touched to the heart, she broke down and mingled her tears with theirs.

And now her true life began. At first it was hard. The old memories came crowding back upon her. Her uncle's face seemed to stare at her from the deserted halls; and when she entered the room where she and Marie had nursed and tended Claude through his illness,

such an agony of remembrance rushed over her that it seemed as if at last her mind must be unhinged. She sought refuge in occupation; late and early she worked as no De Roberval had ever worked before, and her retainers called down blessings on her head. But when the toil of the day was over, and she sought her lonely pillow, she heard all night the booming of the waves on the rock-bound shore, and saw the faces of her dead staring at her out of the darkness.

Thus the days of her desolate widowhood dragged themselves by. Her youth was gone, and the grey hairs which had startled Cartier had now many companions. But they seemed only to add beauty and character to her sweet, sad face. She gave herself up to unselfish devotion to others and her duty; and as if the storms of her life had buffeted themselves into exhaustion in her youth, the rest of her days seemed destined to pass in peace and tranquillity—if not in happiness.

She heard at intervals from La Pommeraye. Means of communication were difficult and uncertain in those days, but he contrived to send her occasional messages, and to assure her of his undying devotion and readiness to serve her in any way she might need. Often her heart ached within her when tales were brought of a famous soldier who was ever in the brunt of the battle, who courted death, but whom death seemed to shun.

At last she learned of a desperate fight, in which the forces of France had almost come to wreck. A gallant hero had led his division to victory. During a short respite he had removed his helmet, and was watching the life-and-death struggle in the valley below him. Suddenly he saw the French line waver. Bidding his men follow him, and with his lion-like hair streaming in the wind, he galloped into the thick of the fray. Right and left he struck; left and right the enemy fell before him. The battle was won for France; but on a heap of corpses he was found with a bullet in his brain: "Dead on the field of honour"; dead in the prime of his strength; with an unblemished record, and a name dear to every soldier in the kingdom.

THE END

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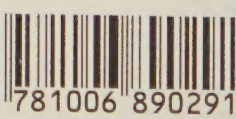

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Thomas Guthrie Marquis (July 7, 1864–April 1, 1936) was a Canadian historian. Marquis was born in Chatham, New Brunswick. His parents were Hugh P. Marquis and Mary [illegible]ather was employed in the [illegible]ustry. He attended school in Chatham but at age 16 he went to Queen's University, Kingston, where he graduated in 1889. He became a teacher, but he retired in 1901 to devote himself to literature. He worked briefly in Ottawa as an editorial writer with the Ottawa Free Press but went to Toronto where he worked as a freelance writer. He was office editor of *Canada and Its Provinces* (1914–15), a publication in 22 volumes on the history of Canada.

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